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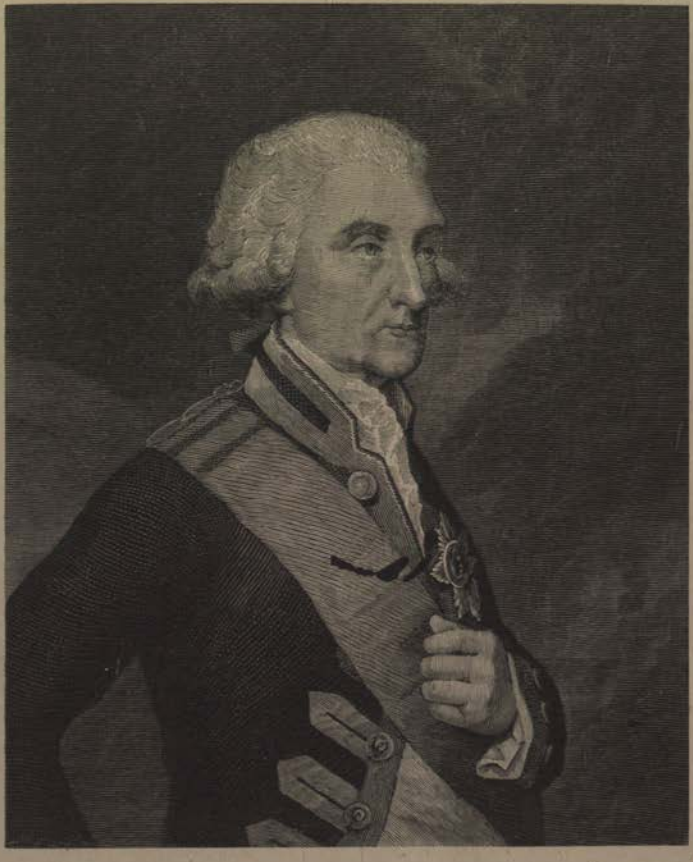
RODNEY



RODNEY

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BY

DAVID HANNAY

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CHAPTER I

FAMILY AND EARLY CAREER

GEORGE BRYDGES RODNEY, the most famous of the great generation of English admirals who raised the navy to the level at which Nelson found it, was by descent a Somersetshire man. The family was one of considerable antiquity—of more antiquity indeed than fame. From the reign of Henry the Third until far into the seventeenth century they were established as owners of land in and about Stoke Rodney, at the foot of the Mendips, in the valley of the Axe between Draycott and Wells. The history of the house was summed up by Sir Edward Rodeney, the last of them who held the family estate, in words which I do not presume to think I can better, and shall therefore quote.

> Their faults whatsoever are not written in great letters, or become the subject of common fame, or the courts of justice; but as they lived without scandal, so they died without shame, going out of the world by the ordinary gate of sickness, and never by the hand of violence, some few excepted of ancient times, that died in the wars, and the late unfortunate gentleman, Sir George Rodeney, who fell by his own sword; and although civil dissentions, in the Barons Wars, did

engage men in one side or the other, yet they for any I can find lived in a calm amidst these tempests, and were not entangled in the quarrels of the times. The reason of it may be that having a firm estate of their own, and able to subsist of themselves, they kept independent, living within their own orb, and mastering those affections of envy and ambition which commonly do but raise men for a greater fall. They had been always, from the time we first discover them, of the middle rank of subjects which is the most safe place—"*Cives medii salvi sunt maxime*," few or none of better estate, under the degree of Lords until the great flood of Church lands (whereof they possessed not one foot) improved many men's fortunes to a great height; nay, which is strange, from Sir Richard Rodeney, who was borne under Henry the Third, to Sir George Rodeney in 42 of Elizabeth, the space of above four hundred years, they stood like *Mare Mortuum* and neither ebbed nor flowed in their fortunes; they were so provident not to lessen; but neither by marriages, which is the ordinary step of augmentation, nor by any other means did they make any addition, insomuch that at this day I give the coat single which my ancestors gave without quartering any other.

Here, adorned with the brocaded elegance proper to the time of the writer, is a summing up of the history of a solid English country family. Stoke Rodney lay out of the track of the great storms of English history, and its position helped the family to stand like *Mare Mortuum* for four hundred years. Still, a house which could live through all that happened in England between Henry the Third and Elizabeth without loss or gain, must have been of an equable temperament, free from great vices, follies, or qualities. The last stage was less peaceful, for Sir Edward Rodeney has to record money troubles and family disputes. He was himself a more stirring man than his ancestors had been. In his youth he fled abroad with Sir Edward Seymour, the husband

of Arabella Stuart, afterwards Marquis of Hertford. His exile, however, was short. He returned, was married, not, as he complacently records, without splendour of ceremonial, to Mistress Frances Southwell, "a lady of Queen Anna's private chamber," in 1614, and spent the remainder of his life as a country gentleman in the west. In 1626 he was a deputy-lieutenant, and felt himself called upon to explain in his place in Parliament the excesses of the pressed men who were drawn into the west by Buckingham's unlucky expeditions, and were treated as to pay and provend with that little care which Captain Dugald Dalgetty told the Marquis of Montrose might, according to custom, be bestowed on the common soldier. Sir Edward was a strong Royalist, and lived long enough to suffer for his royalism. Although he was otherwise a man much of the same kidney, he did not share the Baron of Bradwardine's opinions as to the duty of keeping a family estate in the male line. His only son died before him, and he allowed Stoke Rodney to pass to his daughters. One of these ladies married into the family of Brydges of Kainsham, and thereby supplied a cousin of hers with a useful connection.

Sir Edward could have found male heirs had he so chosen, for he had three brothers: Henry, who was drowned on the coast of Africa; William, who does not concern us; and George. From this George came Anthony (the first of the family who spelt his name Rodney), Lieutenant-Colonel of Leigh's regiment of horse, who served under Peterborough in Spain, and Henry. This Henry was the father of the Admiral. Having begun as a cornet of horse, he left the army and then was appointed, by the interest of his connection the

Duke of Chandos, the representative of the Brydges of Kainsham, to a post in the Royal Yacht of George the First. Henry Rodney had a family of five children by his wife, Mary, daughter of Sir Henry Newton, "Envoy-Extraordinary to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and afterwards Judge of the Admiralty, etc. etc." He naturally profited by his position for the good of his family. The King stood godfather to the second son, together with the Duke of Chandos, and the boy was christened George Brydges. It was for this reason, according to Major-General Mundy, the Admiral's son-in-law and the editor of his correspondence, that the Christian name of George, which had been common in the Rodney family, was given to the boy who was to live to break the French line on August 12th, 1782.

This is the family account of the Admiral's descent, and there is no reason to doubt its substantial accuracy. Sir Egerton Brydges, than whom no one was better entitled to insist on the delusions to which men are subject when their pedigrees are in question, does indeed utter a word of warning in his edition of Collins' Peerage. He remarks with perfect truth that "the slender notice taken of such branches [as this younger branch of the Rodneys to wit] in the Heralds' Visitations, the long disuse of those visitations, together with the general confusion in which this kingdom was involved by the Civil War between King Charles and the Parliament, and the great destruction of family deeds and evidences which it occasioned, must render it extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, for not only his lordship, but also most of the descendants from younger sons of the best families of the kingdom to join themselves to their old

family stock." These are words of wisdom, and it is just possible that the Admiral did not really descend from the Rodneys of Rodney Stoke. Still there is good evidence to show that the claim was well founded. It was recognised by the Duke of Chandos when the Admiral had become famous, which is something; and, what is much more, it was allowed in his youth by George Brydges of Avington and Kainsham—a representative of the house into which Sir Edward Rodeney's daughter had married. Sir Egerton Brydges has himself recorded that young Rodney "was brought up and spent part of his early youth under the patronage of George Brydges of Avington and Kainsham, which confirms the presumption of his descent." We may therefore take it as reasonably well proved that the Count de Grasse, who by the way dated from the tenth century, was defeated and taken off Dominica by a gentleman of descent not greatly inferior to his own. It is just possible that the Admiral's Christian names were given in compliment to the kinsman who patronised his early youth. Henry Rodney was at least fortunate in that he was able to so name his son as to give him a species of claim on his King, on one whom his King delighted to honour, and on a relation whose interest was well worth having. The boy started in life in the position of a gentleman with excellent connections.

Rodney was in all probability one of the many famous men who belong by birth to London. He was baptized on February 13th, 1718, at St. George's-in-the-Fields, and it may be considered as certain that he was born in the January of the same year. His schooling, which cannot have been prolonged, was received at

Harrow—then a grammar school of no especial fame. At the age of twelve he went to sea as a King's-letter boy, being the last of those who entered the navy in that way.

The term King's-letter boy requires some little explanation. Nothing distinguished our ancestors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from their descendants of to-day more completely than their indifference to formal regularity in the organisation of the public services, and their tolerance of anomalies. As for organisation, they were satisfied with as little of it as would serve the turn, and they endured anomalies with serene indifference as long as they were not intolerable in their practical results. They were not much addicted to giving their idea of an organisation, and when they did were inspired by the faith that if only the right men were got to fill places the good work would follow. The getting of good men, they held, was only possible by the strenuous application of patriotism, zeal for the King's service, and intelligence on the part of those who had to select. Therefore they were content to allow a great freedom of choice to those in authority. The navy itself, though its efficiency was a matter of life and death to the nation, was contentedly left in a condition which on all modern principles should have had disastrous results. There was a central corps of commissioned officers—lieutenants, captains, and admirals. These men formed the permanent staff of the navy. Whether on active service or not, they were on the list, and drew pay. All others who were employed, warrant officers, petty officers, and men, were shipped as in the merchant service for the voyage.

Their connection with the navy was limited to the ship on which they served, and terminated with the commission. Until some years after Rodney entered the navy the loss of a ship by wreck was held to terminate the engagement of all the crew. Their pay ceased, and with the pay their obligation to obey orders. It was not until it was found impossible to punish the men who so cruelly deserted Captain Cheape after the wreck of the *Wager* on Anson's voyage that the modern practice was introduced of holding that the commission of the ship lasts till she has been formally paid off, and with it the liability of all hands to punishment by court-martial. Hence the apparent absurdity by which a captain may be dismissed from a vessel which has been at the bottom of the sea for months. If she were not regularly paid off, captain, officers, and men would continue to belong to her, and to draw their full pay so long as they lived. At all times, no doubt, there were warrant officers and seamen who served for life, and the dockyards had a permanent staff. None the less it was wholly the theory, and very much the practice, that when a ship was paid off, all who had been on board her except her captain and lieutenants ceased to be officially connected with the navy. So long as squadrons had to be fitted out it was convenient for the Admiralty to have warrant officers and seamen under its hand. So those who chose to engage again were commonly taken on; but there was no obligation to take them, nor were they bound to serve, unless they were pressed again.

From out of this body were chosen the lieutenants, and here the indifference of our ancestors to finish of organisation was very strongly shown. There were a number

of regulations as to what qualified a man for a commission, but in practice the rule was that any one who had served a term of years at sea, of which some were in a king's ship, who could hand, reef, and steer, could navigate a little and keep a log, who could find a friend to put in a word for him in the right quarter, was competent to receive a commission. If the friend could not be found then he might go on in the navy for life without ever, in Nelson's phrase, getting his foot on the ladder. He might remain a midshipman, who was, and is, a warrant officer, till his death. Moreover, if he could not get a ship when his last had been paid off, the Admiralty did not recognise him. Men could be made lieutenants from before the mast, and there are cases of such promotions. A captain, as all readers of Marryat's *King's Own* will remember, could put boys on the quarter-deck. If at a later period he had the interest, he could obtain a commission for his client. There is a romantic story told about that Admiral Campbell who was Hawke's flag-captain at Quiberon, which, as it illustrates the navy of Rodney's time, may be told here. Campbell was the son of a Scotch minister, and was apprenticed to the skipper of a small trading craft in the west of Scotland. The vessel was overhauled by a king's ship with a press warrant. The navy captain selected those of her crew who seemed best worth pressing. Among them was a newly-married man, who, overcome at the prospect of indefinite separation from his young wife, began to cry. Campbell knew that as an apprentice he was exempt from the press, but he knew also that the King's service went over everything. If he chose to volunteer he could thereby break his indentures. Being a boy of a

tender heart and a high spirit he resolved to save the husband if he could. He therefore went up to the naval officer and offered a bargain. He presented himself as a substitute for the sailor. The officer very sensibly took the offer, saying that he thought a spirited lad a good exchange for a blubbering man. Campbell made up his kit, and went to serve King George as powder monkey. But his spirit had pleased the naval captain, and after a time this gentleman put him on the quarter-deck, introduced him to good friends, who helped him to share in Anson's famous voyage, and so to win his commission as lieutenant. Once on the ladder, Campbell rose by force of native faculty, and his power of making people believe in him. He lived to be at Hawke's right hand at Quiberon, to become the friend of Keppel, and he died an admiral. Even if this story has been somewhat embellished, it shows what was thought possible in Rodney's time, and illustrates what may fairly be called the elasticity of our old naval practice. No man could be a lieutenant who had not served the King; but he who had, whether it was as foremast-hand, master's mate, midshipman, or captain's servant (for young gentlemen were put on the quarter-deck under that title), and could be said to be competent, could in the old naval phrase "be made," if he could induce an admiral in command of a squadron who had a vacancy, or the Admiralty at home, to make him.

This laxity, as it would be called now, had its bad side, no doubt. Mean men in mean times took advantage of it, and permitted themselves a good deal of favouritism and jobbery. But it had its good side too. A captain might pay his tailor's bill by putting his tailor's son on the

quarter-deck; but he was much more likely to put his own son or nephew, or the son of an old comrade, there. In any case his own honour was concerned in the fitness of the lad whom he thus marked out as candidate for a lieutenant's commission. An admiral might give his own incompetent offspring a commission or a ship. Marryat has preserved a wild legend about an admiral who did so, and then, when the youth made a fool of himself, inflicted paternal chastisement on him in the after cabin of the flag-ship—perhaps with a piece of inch-and-a-half with a Turk's head on it. As a matter of sober fact, an admiral who knew how much his own honour and even safety depended on the fitness of his officers had every motive to select them well—when he had a chance to select them at all. At any rate the system, or no system, which allowed the rapid rise of Anson and Hawke, Saunders and Pocock, Rodney, the Hoods, Howe, Collingwood, and Nelson, can dare to be judged by its fruits. Could the most uniform organisation, the most careful avoidance of favouritism and jobbery, have done better for us?

Our fathers were at ease in their minds on the subject, for about 1730 they—and here we come back to the King's-letter boy—saw the abolition of the only approach to an organisation by which a regular corps of candidates for a lieutenant's commission had till then been provided; and they saw it with indifference. During the Restoration, and in the early part of the eighteenth century, it had been the custom to send a certain number of boys on board ship with a King's "Letter of Service." These lads were considered to have a better right to be made lieutenants than others. They answered, in fact,

to the modern cadet. It does not seem that they were held to be entitled to a commission, but they were more likely to get it than another. As a Letter of Service would not be given except to those who had some interest, they probably did get their commissions as a rule. In this way some regular provision was made for the supply of a corps of officers. About 1730, however, the elder Byng, he who won the battle off Cape Passaro, being then a commissioner at the Admiralty, decided to abolish the King's Letter, and to establish a naval school at Portsmouth in which boys might be trained for the sea service. This sounds very modern, but Byng carried out his reform in the genuine spirit of the eighteenth century. He did not declare that only those should become lieutenants who had passed through the naval school, and he did leave the expense of supporting the boys who went to study there wholly to their families. It was therefore not the interest of a parent who could get his boy sent straight on board ship to send him to the naval school. So, though the place went on it was much neglected, and many of the most famous naval officers who entered the service after it had been established had never belonged to it. Rodney was, it has been said already, the last of those who entered the navy in the old way.

When he first went to sea we were in the middle of the long peace maintained by Walpole. A considerable naval force was kept up, for though Sir Robert would not use the fleet, he never allowed foreigners to forget it was there to be used in case of need. Little notice was taken of midshipmen in those days—so little, in fact, that it is often impossible to tell

when an officer first went to sea. The actual date of the entry into the service of so famous a man as Lord Hawke was long unknown. According to General Mundy, Rodney's first captain was Medley, afterwards an admiral, and he passed most of his early years of service on the Newfoundland station. He became an officer when he was "made" by Haddock in the Mediterranean on February 15th, 1739. It would seem, therefore, that Rodney's interest was not strong enough to get him a commission till after an apprenticeship of nine years, or nearly thrice the period required by the rules of the service. In this respect he was far less lucky than his contemporary Howe, who was in command of a ship before he was twenty.

In 1739 the long peace was at an end, and England had entered on the three-quarters of a century of fighting, relieved by uneasy truces, which were to leave her the uncontested mistress of the seas. The war which began about Jenkins' Ear and developed into the Austrian Succession had just broken out. A fleet was sent into the Mediterranean under Nicholas Haddock, member of an Essex family which had been distinguished in the navy from the Commonwealth time. Haddock's duty was to look after any Spanish squadron which might put to sea, to support our garrison at Minorca, to take prizes, and to ravage the coast. The work was well done, but it afforded few opportunities of distinction. Spain was too weak to meet us openly, and the English fleet was mostly engaged in blockading Don José Navarro at Cadiz, and in endeavouring to keep the Straits of Gibraltar free from privateers. Towards the close of 1741 the Spaniards succeeded in slipping to sea while

Haddock was at Gibraltar, and in covering the despatch of Spanish troops from Barcelona to Northern Italy, where they were to operate against the Austrians for the purpose of putting the Milanese into the possession of the Infante Don Felipe. The escape of Don José and the passage of the Spaniards was a famous incident of the times, and the cause of much clamour; but it has no connection with the life of Rodney, and may be left alone here. It was almost a matter of course that the retreat of Haddock should be put down to the profound cunning which, to the unending joy of all Englishmen of humour, is attributed to us by the sagacious foreigner. We went away to gain our private ends. The true explanation was simpler. Ships grew rapidly foul in the time before the value of copper-sheeting had been discovered. Haddock's vessels wanted scraping, and, moreover, had been knocked about by the autumn storms; so he retired to Gibraltar to refit. While he was there Navarro slipped out and ran through the Gut. As soon as the squadron was ready for sea Haddock followed. When he came up with the Spaniards he found them in company with a French squadron under M. de Court. The French Admiral informed him that the Italian enterprise was undertaken in alliance with his master, and that no attack on the Spaniards could be permitted. England and France were still nominally at peace, though they were actively opposed to one another in the character of allies to Austria or Prussia. The position was an extraordinary one, and Haddock very pardonably shrank from the responsibility of attacking the allies. He retired to Minorca and waited for orders.

For a period of more than a year after this the English, French, and Spaniards remained in a state of war which was no war, and peace which was not peace. The allies lay at Toulon quarrelling and fighting duels. The English watched them from Minorca or Hyères Bay. The French would not allow us to attack the Spanish squadron, but they left us at full liberty to obtain water and provisions in their territory. They even went so far as to tolerate the destruction of five Spanish galleys by our fire-ships in St. Tropez Bay, but they were notoriously preparing to fight us a little later on. Altogether, the diplomatic and military situation was one to which it would be hard to find a parallel. In this, as in the previous stage of the naval war, few opportunities for real service were afforded, and, such as they were, none of them came in Rodney's way.

Early in 1742 Haddock's health broke down and he returned to England. After a brief period, during which Rear-Admiral Lestock held the command, Admiral Mathews arrived from England with reinforcements to take it over. The change did no harm to Rodney, who was appointed by the new commander to the *Plymouth*, sixty-four, on a vacancy made by the transfer of Captain Watson to the *Dragon*. Immediately afterwards he was sent home with a convoy, and so escaped having to bear a part in the most inglorious passage in the history of the English navy—the battle of February 11th, 1744, off Toulon, and the long series of scandalous court-martials which arose out of it. We have happily no concern with the miserable Mathews and Lestock quarrel except to note that as the Admiral was afterwards dismissed the service for bearing down

on the enemy out of his line of battle, it served to harden that hide-bound system of tactics which made naval engagements so utterly indecisive till Rodney himself broke through it thirty-eight years later in the West Indies. The acting rank as post-captain conferred by the command of the *Plymouth* was confirmed on his arrival in England, and he was now firmly established on the ladder. A man rose from lieutenant to captain by selection, from captain to admiral by seniority, and if post-rank did not come too late, was tolerably sure of reaching flag-rank. Whether he would ever actually hoist his flag at sea would still depend on luck and merit. Rodney had passed from the great class below lieutenant which had no rights, and from the rank of lieutenant which was the highest reached by many men, not so rapidly as some of his contemporaries, but still speedily. At five-and-twenty years of age, and with twelve years of service, he stood on his own quarter-deck with the best of prospects that he might one day command a fleet.

Although these years of apprenticeship contain no incident of interest in Rodney's career, they—and particularly the last three of them—must have been of vital importance to him. They had taught him his business as a matter of course, and had hardened him to the sea life. How hard it was we know from *Roderick Random*. There is a certain amount of deliberate exaggeration for purposes of literary effect in Smollett's great book, but its essential truth is beyond dispute. A ship is never for those who have to work her, or fight her, a luxurious dwelling-place, but in the early eighteenth century the interval between what would be

counted decent comfort on shore and the utmost attainable comfort at sea was indeed great. Ships were small, and crowded with men and guns. The between-decks were low, ill ventilated, and abounding in stenches. Officers of all ranks slept in hammocks, and captains who were anxious for the efficiency of their ships would not tolerate standing cabins. It may be asserted with confidence that the officers of His Majesty's ships were worse lodged, about 1740, than the crew of a sailing merchant-vessel of to-day. A man had to be made of tough stuff to stand it all. When Rodney was captain of the *Eagle* he took his brother to sea with him. One cruise was enough for James Rodney, and he went ashore for good on his return to port. Even those who were made of sterner fibre could not endure the hardships of the life. They broke down with gout, rheumatism, and diseases of the nature of scurvy, brought on by exposure, bad air, and bad food. Habitual indulgence in fiery liquors had something to do with the prevalence of gout and stone among naval men, but the fiery liquors were not only the fashion of the time, they were also the natural refuge of men whose nerves were affected by stinks and whose palates were exasperated by salt food. In the matter of liquor, Rodney probably went with the multitude around him to do evil, taking his share of whatever bumbo or hypsy (dreadful compounds of rum or brandy and wine, all young and all fiery, disguised in spices) was going on board or ashore. At least he never shrank from more fashionable dissipations in later times, and probably did not care to be singular in earlier days. When he was famous there were old men who boasted

that they had shared in the carouses of his youth. Then, too, he had tell-tale sufferings in later years from the gout, the prevailing disease of that hard-drinking generation.

All this, however, was the life of his time and his service which he shared with other men. To him, who was born to be a great commander, the spectacle afforded by the fleet during his three years' service must indeed have been especially instructive. It must have taught him what a squadron ought not to be, and how it ought not to be managed. The navy of that time was the navy of Hawser Trunnion, Esquire. Now one may have a real affection for Hawser Trunnion personally, and yet be compelled to acknowledge that the generation of officers of which he is the type fought less well than English naval men have done before or since. It was not that they were not brave, for they often were; nor yet that they were not seamen, for that also they were; but there was far too often something which they preferred to the discharge of their duty. It was often party politics, for they were very Whig and very Tory. Too many of them were members of Parliament, and owed their commands to their seats. In that case they carried on the party battle with one another in presence of the enemy. Perhaps they did not actually betray one another, but they believed one another to be capable of treason. The Tory officer saw the Whig in a mess with a certain complacency, and the Whig was pleased when baffling winds gave him an excuse for not coming to the help of the Tory. As an inevitable consequence their fighting was apt to be slack, and their recriminations furious. Personal quarrels were carried to a pitch of rancour not to be rivalled out of a

cloister. Mathews was brutally insolent to Lestock, and Lestock hated Mathews with the concentrated fury of Mr. Browning's Spanish Monk. When one turns over the pamphlets they wrote against one another, the picture of Commodore Trunnion as he listened to the report that Admiral Bower was to be made a British peer, rises at once. The mug, we remember, fell from his hand, and shivered into a thousand fragments; his eye glistened like that of a rattlesnake. Even so may Lestock have behaved when he heard that his enemy Mathews was coming to command him. His pamphlets were certainly written with the venom of a rattlesnake. Many years later, when Rodney was himself a peer, and at the head of the profession, he deliberately recorded on the margin of a copy of Clerk's *Tactics* his belief that Lestock had betrayed his superior officer. The judgment was too harsh, but it shows what an impression the factions in the fleet had made on Rodney's mind. When he was afterwards in command he showed a distinct readiness to believe that some of his subordinates were capable of the same conduct, and he resented their conduct fiercely. It is premature to discuss his justice on this occasion, but, no doubt, the memory of what he had seen in the Mediterranean was very present with him in those days, exasperating his suspicions and animating him to stamp the bad spirit out.

CHAPTER II

SERVICE AS CAPTAIN TILL 1752

On his arrival in England Rodney's post-rank was confirmed, and he was appointed to the *Sheerness*. She was a much smaller ship than the *Plymouth*, but a post-ship none the less—that is, a vessel large enough to be commanded by a post-captain and not by a commander. Over this intermediate rank, which every officer must now pass through on his way from lieutenant to captain, Rodney appears to have skipped in the free and easy way the time allowed to those who had luck or interest. Interest Rodney certainly did not want. If his own words, written many years later, are to be understood in their literal sense, it was the best a man could then have —the interest of the Pelhams. In 1756 Rodney declared in a letter to the famous electioneering Duke of Newcastle, the "noodle" who would allow nobody to govern England without him, that he owed all his preferment in the navy to His Grace. This statement was, however, made in a private note, at a time when the writer was in lively expectation of future electoral favours, and need not be taken as rigidly accurate. It is at all events certain that Rodney did not want for friends at Court, for he was in command of sea-going ships, mostly

on home stations, for the next ten years without a break. A man may use interest in two ways. He can either get comfortable billets on shore, or can avail himself of it to be put in the way of seeing service, and must be judged by the use he makes of a good thing.

On the whole the use Rodney made of it was honourable. It is true that he did not go to the East Indies, or to the Mediterranean, then the scene of mere dull cruising, and not the model station as it became in the Napoleonic wars. Neither did he go to the West Indies, which he was to make the "station for honour" in future years. He stayed steadily at home in the Channel doing such service as the nature of the war he was engaged in permitted. This, it must be acknowledged, was for the most part not brilliant. The war of Jenkins' Ear, or of the Austrian Succession, was the dullest we ever fought. At sea it was first and foremost a privateer war. The navy was poorer in spirit than it ever had or has been. Failures and courts-martial were numerous, and the decisions of some of these last were so scandalous that Parliament was driven into passing the drastic act which left the officers who tried Byng no alternative but to condemn him to death for want of spirit. Part of our sins was the fault of our enemies. They were never strong or spirited enough to make us stretch ourselves. The Spaniard would never fight unless his back was against a wall, and then to be sure, as we found at Carthagena, he could make a desperate stand. Now and then a Spanish liner would bear a tremendous amount of hammering before she struck—witness the *Glorioso*, which kept a whole swarm of our warships and privateers at work for days before they got her. But

their fleets were contemptible. Their courage and efficiency were of the passive kind. The French fleet was at its lowest in strength if not in courage. Cardinal Fleury had persistently neglected it, and France herself had hardly begun to recover from the terrible exhaustion caused by the wars of Louis the Fourteenth. Neither Spaniards nor Frenchmen could put our fleets on their mettle, and so the natural tendency of a dull time was unchecked.

From 1743 to 1747 Rodney was engaged on mainly routine duties in the successive ships which he commanded—the *Sheerness* of twenty guns, the *Ludlow Castle* of forty, the *Centurion* of fifty, and the *Eagle* of sixty. He patrolled the North Sea in search of privateers, he protected convoys, he took soldiers to and from the Low Countries. In the *Ludlow Castle* he took a large privateer from St. Malo. In the *Centurion* he helped to patrol the coast of Scotland during the Forty-Five on the look-out for adventurers who might bring help to the Jacobites. When bringing the *Centurion* back from this service he had the ill-luck to run on the Whiting Sand off Orfordness, and lose thirty feet of his false keel and his rudder. The pilot was held very properly, no doubt, to be responsible, and Rodney passed without loss of credit to the command of the *Eagle*. The four years were useful to Rodney, no doubt; they gave him experience in the handling of a ship, and they showed his patrons that he was worth patronising. More need not, and indeed cannot, be said about them.

In 1747 the lazy naval war flamed up for a moment—just before it was ended by the uneasy truce called the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748. France made a reso-

lute effort both to help its forces in the East Indies, and to protect the return of its convoys from the West. England pulled herself together, and decided to defeat this intention. Early in spring two squadrons were despatched —a strong one under Anson, to look for the French on their way to the East Indies, and a small one under Commodore Fox, to look for the home-coming French West India convoy. Both were successful. Fortune, which was never tired of rewarding Anson for so magnificently supporting the honour of the English flag in the bad times when Vernon was failing at Carthagena and Mathews was wrangling with Lestock in the Mediterranean, threw the East India convoy in his way. He captured ten of them—thereby earning his peerage and a second sackful of prize-money. Rodney served in the subordinate squadron under Fox. His ship the *Eagle* was one of the six which this commodore had under him. To them also fortune was kind. In June, about a month after Anson's victory, the English squadron fell in, off Cape Ortugal, with the West India convoy of one hundred and seventy sail of merchant ships, under the guard of four war-ships. Men-of-war and merchant ships scattered at the sight of them. The King's ships got off, but Fox's squadron had a day of easy and lucrative work in snapping up the merchant runaways, whereof they took forty-eight of 16,051 tons in all. As they were laden with West Indian produce, the day's work must have been better than a year's pay to at least every captain in the squadron.

Here Rodney had seen how a convoy ought not to be protected. It was the clear duty of the four French captains to fight so long as fighting was possible, to cover

the escape of the unarmed ships. Before the year was out he had an opportunity of seeing how that duty could be fulfilled in the most noble manner. During the summer the French were collecting in the Basque Roads a great convoy of outward-bound merchant ships. The English Government resolved to intercept this also, and in the autumn Lord Anson, who was at the head of the Admiralty, selected the best officer he could have found in the navy to replace himself. A squadron of fourteen sail, with the *Eagle* among them, was collected at Plymouth, and placed under the command of Rear-Admiral Edward Hawke. In August Admiral Hawke sailed with orders to attack the convoy in the roadstead; but when he was on Lord Anson's cruising ground, off Finisterre, he came at daybreak on August 14th upon the French at sea under the protection of nine ships of war. There was on the English side a superiority of five ships and more than two hundred guns, but the French commander, Desherbiers de l'Etenduère, decided to make a fight. He had approached the English under the impression that they were a portion of his own convoy, which had parted in the night. So soon as he saw his mistake he did his best to correct it. The convoy was sent off under the care of the *Content*, sixty-four. Then, having weakened himself for the sake of his charge, M. de l'Etenduère made ready to sacrifice himself for it also. He formed his remaining eight ships into a line of battle across the road of the English squadron, and, keeping vigilantly on his guard, edged away after his flying convoy.

At the sight of the French, Hawke had at first formed his line of battle; but as the day wore on he saw the

extent of his own superiority, and saw also that the French, being to windward of him, would be able to keep their distance till dark if he continued to approach them in the regular formation, which would necessarily mean at something a little below the speed of the slowest of his fourteen ships. He therefore hauled down the signal for the line of battle, and ordered a general chase, which is the technical name of the simplest of all possible manœuvres—going, namely, at the enemy as fast as wind, tide, and the sailing powers of your ship would allow you. Hawke was fond of attacking in this fashion, and about eleven years after this day did so, under heroic circumstances, at the magnificent sea-fight off Quiberon. In the battle with L'Etenduère there was less to do, but such as it was, it was gallantly done. The first to come up with the enemy was Captain Arthur Scott of the *Lion*, who, at about midday, as it were, seized hold of them, and clung to their skirts till help came. It was not delayed. Other English ships swarmed up fast—the *Eagle* among them—each getting into action as she could, and all pressing on the Frenchmen. Six of the eight struck, but not till after hard fighting, prolonged in the case of two of them till seven in the evening. There was no manœuvring; it was all plain hammer-and-tongs work, in which the *Eagle* had her full share. Early in the fight she came under the guns of the *Tonnant*, the French flag-ship, an eighty-gunner, and was badly mauled. Her steering-gear being disabled, she fell on board of Hawke's own ship the *Devonshire*, and the two drifted out of the fight before they could get clear of one another. This stop was only temporary. Hawke soon

got back into action, and Rodney made good his damage. When at last L'Etenduère, having done enough for honour, prepared to escape with his own ship the *Tonnant*, and the only other survivor of his squadron the *Intrepide*, Rodney joined Saunders of the *Yarmouth* (he who afterwards helped Wolfe to conquer Quebec) and Philip Saumarez of the *Nottingham* in pursuing the only remains of the enemy. The *Eagle* and the *Yarmouth* were soon left behind. The *Nottingham* alone came up with the retreating Frenchmen. In this stage of the fight the odds had shifted to the other side. The *Tonnant* was an eighty-gun ship; the *Intrepide* a seventy-four. Against two such enemies the sixty guns of the *Nottingham* were too few. Captain Saumarez indeed fought till he fell mortally wounded; but the officer who succeeded him gave up the unequal conflict, and at dark Hawke hoisted the signal of recall. The *Tonnant* and the *Intrepide* made their way back to port.

It was a very pretty fight altogether, and on L'Etenduère's part a most gallant and able one. His bravery and his judgment were equally conspicuous. Not only did he save his honour, but he saved his convoy. During those seven hours of fighting the merchant ships had escaped to windward. When dark came down Hawke, with six shattered French prizes on his hands, and several of his own ships greatly damaged in hull and rigging, had nothing for it but to make his way back to England. On our side again, though it was not one of the fights we should rank with Quiberon or the Nile, it was a creditable piece of service. Good use was made of our superior numbers, and as the French ships were larger than our own, and the calibre

of the guns somewhat heavier, the odds in our favour were not so great as they look on a mere statement of numbers and broadsides. One unhappy feature of the naval war of the time was not wanting. There was a court-martial on Captain Fox of the *Kent*—Rodney's commodore in the cruise of the previous June—who was accused of hanging back in the action. The charge was largely supported by Rodney's own evidence, and was held to be proved. Fox was dismissed the service, and though afterwards restored by the King, was not again employed. Rodney was thought to have borne somewhat hardly on the poor man, being aggrieved by want of support when he felt he needed it in the action. As we get more means of seeing Rodney's character it will, I think, become very credible that he would be especially harsh in his condemnation of want of zeal when he had himself suffered from it. That Fox had not behaved so well in the action as Rodney, Saunders, Saumarez, or Scott is beyond question. It is also certain that the naval courts-martial of that time were not, as a rule, remarkable for the severity of their sentences, and we may rest content that substantial justice was done.

The Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle did not turn Rodney on shore. His interest was good enough to save him from the too common fate of naval officers in the days when the reduction of the establishment from a war to a peace footing was carried out with but little regard to the claims of those who could not make their voice heard loudly at Whitehall. Moreover, he was now known as one who was well able to fulfil his side of the bargain which is generally made, at least tacitly, between patron and client. He was an officer whom it was a credit to

push. When he happened to be in London, just after the action with L'Etenduère, Anson took him to the King. George the Second expressed his surprise at Captain Rodney's youth, which, by the way, would imply that His Majesty's acquaintance with his own post list was not exhaustive, for it certainly contained several younger officers than the commander of the *Eagle*. Then Anson, so says the story, replied by expressing a wish that His Majesty's Navy contained more young captains of the stamp of Captain Rodney. This was high praise indeed from Anson, who was never lavish of praise, and was indeed so cold that Smollett accused him of raying out frost on all who came near him. The words of a First Lord, and one who had a particular care in pushing on men whom he thought worthy of promotion, were not likely to fall to the ground. In March, 1749, Rodney was appointed Governor of Newfoundland, and at the same time Captain of H.M.S. *Rainbow*.

This was not a cumulation of offices. The governorship of Newfoundland was then a naval post. We considered the place as a fishing-station, and indeed it was little else. The fishermen and the fisheries were directly under "Admirals of the Fisheries," resident officers from whom there lay an appeal to the officers of H.M. ships on the coast. Other settlers were under justices, who however had no jurisdiction over the fisherfolk. At the head of all was the chief naval officer on the station. So completely were the Fisheries considered as the colony that the Governor only stayed there during the season to protect them. For the rest of the year he was doing convoy work, out and home, or was lying in the Longreach. He had a regular round specified to

him with much precision by My Lords. In spring he was to drop down to the Downs with his own ship and any others put under his command. From thence he was to proceed down Channel looking in at Pool, Weymouth, Topsham, Plymouth, and Falmouth. Sailing from this port he was to make the best of his way to the Banks of Newfoundland with the Fishing Fleet, "And in regard it has been represented to us that pirate ships did formerly lurk about the Banks of Newfoundland and infest the ships fishing on that coast, you are never to make any unnecessary stay in port, nor suffer the *Boston* (she was another vessel under his command) to do so, but keep diligently cruising at sea, and so employ both ships as may most effectually keep the pirates from those parts and protect the trade and His Majesty's subjects." Here follow many instructions as to his duties in those parts touching the assistance to be given to the Fishery Admirals in keeping order, the care to be shown in excluding foreign interlopers, and the vigilance to be exercised in preventing the desertion of English sailors. It was not intended that the Fishery Fleet should limit the supply of men for His Majesty's Navy by carrying emigrants to New England. Therefore Captain Rodney was to see that all ships brought back the complement they took out "except in case of death," when some reasonable latitude would be allowed. On October 1st Rodney was to collect his charge, now fully laden with stock-fish for the Peninsula and the Mediterranean, and was to convoy them to Cadiz, whence after a stay of not more than ten or twelve days he was to see them and such other merchant ships as put themselves under his protection to their respective parts "as high

as Livorno." After a stay of not more than twenty days he was to return by Barcelona, Majorca, Minorca, Alicante, and Cadiz. From thence, after another delay limited to twelve days, he was to make his way, providing for the Lisbon and Oporto trade in person or by deputy, to the Downs, "giving us an account by all opportunities of your proceedings." From the Downs he would come up to the Thames, and there remain, unless ordered to convoy His Majesty from Harwich, till such time as he had to sail for the Banks again.

This routine is worth recording for the illustration it affords of the conditions under which trade was formerly carried on, and the contrast it presents to the freedom and safety of the seas in our times. It was also distinctly service, and Rodney, who served his apprenticeship in it under Medley, must have known what work there was in it before taking the billet. He did not therefore use his influence to shirk work. For the rest the post was a good one—an all-round cruise and a winter in England being much to be preferred to three consecutive years of a foreign station. At a later period the experience must have been invaluable to Rodney. When nearly twenty years later he sailed to relieve Gibraltar, he must have found the value of the practice he had had in taking convoys in and out of the Mediterranean.

In 1751 the regular round was relieved for him by a little piece of surveying service. The Trinity House had in that year before them Mr. William Otton and one Peter Ham his mate, sent by the Admiralty with a circumstantial story of discovery. It was to the effect that on March 4th, 1749, these two mariners in their

bark the *St. Paul* did discover an island in Latitude 49° 40′ N. and Longitude 24° 30′ west of the Lizard. They saw it clearly, and were prepared to swear that it was six or seven leagues long, lying S.S.E. and N.N.W., with a little flat island at the east point of it. Also they swore that there was a great surf, and that one point of the island was as high as Dunnose. On cross-examination it appeared that Mr. Otton and Peter Ham did not cast the lead. The Trinity House did not much believe these mariners who came from a far country, but it thought the matter might be looked into, and so the Admiralty instructed the commander of the Newfoundland convoy, on whose route the supposed island lay, to look into it. Rodney did, and had to report that the alleged island was not there—being either an invention of Mr. Otton and Peter Ham of the *St. Paul*, or some Cape Flyaway seen in a haze, which had solidified in their imaginations between 1749 and 1751. Marryat was sent into the Atlantic on a similar wild goose chase long afterwards, which facts show how long it was before the ocean was so thoroughly surveyed as to make it appear impossible that an undiscovered island should lie between Cape Finisterre and Cape Race on the very track of the American trade.

At all times during this commission there was a possibility that Rodney might have more serious work to do than the protecting fishermen from lurking pirates, or assisting Fishery Admirals. The peace with France never really extended either to America or India. In both there was incessant underhand hostility, flaming now and then into actual fighting. On the North American continent, all along the frontier of New

England and Nova Scotia, there was almost avowed war from the first. Newfoundland was then to us a kind of outpost against the French in Canada, and it was part of Rodney's duty to keep an eye on their agents, who were everywhere pushing, intriguing, insulting, in the style which provoked the great storm of the Seven Years' War. When Rodney first took command of the Newfoundland station he was warned by Sandwich to be on the outlook for the French aggression, which His Majesty's Ministers already expected on the very day after signing the Peace. The letter is worded honourably for Rodney. Sandwich speaks of him as one who can be trusted to act with judgment, and does not need precise instructions. His reputation must therefore have been well established at headquarters as a capable officer. The warning was not unnecessary, for in 1751 Rodney had to despatch Captain Francis William Drake (the brother of the Samuel Francis Drake who was to lead his van on the yet distant April 12th, 1782 —Drakes both of them of the blood of the Elizabethan) to look into the proceedings of a French schooner reported to have turned up at Trepassey Bay just below Cape Race. She "was mounted with 14 carriage-guns besides a number of swivels. Man'd with upwards of fifty men 'she' had put into that port, and erected tents on shore, carrying with them a number of muskets, cuttlasses, and amunition, giving no other account of themselves than that they were come to survey that part of the island, as likewise the harbour of Trepassey, to know whether their draughts in that respect were correct; the said schooner carrying a light in the night as if she expected other vessels."

The storm did not break in Rodney's time, however. Mysterious French schooners turned up with carriaged-guns and swivels, showing menacing lights, but they vanished away again. French agents came and went on the border, intriguing, vapouring, now and then murdering, maintaining French influence in the usual way, till the measure was full, and they were swept for ever from the country they could neither use themselves nor would let others till in peace. Strange it is, and a poor proof of our wisdom, that they still retain those fishing rights on the coast of Newfoundland which it was part of Rodney's duty to see that they did not exceed.

The remnants—stained and tattered—of a letter-book kept by Rodney during his command of the *Rainbow*, and still preserved by his descendants, show him at work doing his duty as naval officer in peace very much as his successors do to-day. He has to report on Dr. Knight's "Magnetic bars," and to test a quick-firing brass gun, as we test and experiment now. Touches here and there show that the Admiralty administration was not of the best—complaints, for instance, that the men's clothes are worn out, so much so as to leave them in absolute need of cover from the weather. Again, the food was but poor, to judge by the frequent orders for survey, and by the condemnation of beef, bread, and beer (for it was not till long after that rum became the standard drink of the navy) which followed the surveys. Sailors of both services, naval and merchant, will grumble at their food on small provocation, and condemn it on trifling evidence; but one does not gather that Rodney was too easily disposed to allow this weakness its way. The *Rainbow's* stores, when

condemned as bad, were bad, we may be sure. He appears at all times to have been careful of the health of his men, knowing that their efficiency depended on it, being moreover naturally a gentleman, and therefore anxious that the humbler folk dependent on him should be comfortable according to the modest standard of their place.

It is a little detail not without interest that Rodney must have worn his first uniform on this commission. Though we had had a regular corps of naval officers since the beginning of the reign of Charles the Second, when the first list was formed by James, then Duke of York (whose merits as an administrator have never had full justice done them), no uniform was ordered till 1749. Officers dressed as they pleased, with a preference for red for show, and for gray, the colour of the slops served to the men, for work. Gradually this omission became a grievance to the naval mind. The officers considered it as in some sort putting them below the soldiers, though they were, as their successors are, very conscious that the navy is the senior service. At last some of them petitioned for a uniform, and were told to choose. They asked for a blue uniform with red facings, or a red uniform with blue facings. It was for one fateful moment doubtful whether the "blue jacket" was to come into existence or not. Happily while it was yet time George the Second met the Duchess of Bedford in the Park wearing a riding habit of blue with *white* facings. It charmed him, and he gave the colour and the facings to the navy, which was not the least wise thing George the Second did in his time—the old navy uniform, the blue coat relieved with white and gold, the white knee-breeches and stockings, was one of the most becoming ever worn.

At first apparently, though there is a doubt, only captains and flag-officers were required to wear it. There is a legend to the effect that when lieutenants were similarly honoured, one uniform was kept in the ward-room, and worn by the officers in turn when they were summoned on board the flag-ship, or sent ashore on duty. Masters had no uniform, and on the Mediterranean station they bought the cast-off red coats of the soldier officers at Gibraltar—trimming them with black. Rum and the blue jacket, which have become inseparable from our notions of the old navy, are both, it will be seen, very modern.

The *Rainbow* was paid off at Woolwich in 1752. Rodney himself landed at Portsmouth, leaving the vessel to be brought round to the river by his First Lieutenant Du Bois. He had to hand her over to his subordinate on the ground of ill health, being, as he pleaded to the Admiralty, very ill and in charge of a physician. Ill health was destined to be only too common with him for the rest of a long life, and he was probably already suffering from the disease of the century—the gout, which in later years first crippled and then killed him.

CHAPTER III

MARRIAGE, THE PRESS-GANG, AND THE FLAG

AFTER twenty-two years of unbroken sea service Rodney was well entitled to an easy billet on shore, or in a harbour ship. Besides, he now established a kind of moral claim to a stationary post, for in 1753 he married. The rank of the lady shows that he had a better social position than the very great majority of contemporary naval officers. They were largely sons of other officers or middle-class people, and they lived among themselves in the ports, marrying and giving in marriage in their own class. Rodney, who had some of the best blood in England in his veins, lived when ashore in the great society of London. His wife was chosen in this, and not in the naval world. She was a daughter of Mr. Charles Compton, brother of the sixth, and father of the seventh, Earl of Northampton. In Rodney's life she is little more than a name. No letter to her or from her has come in my way—partly, no doubt, because the evidence about the Admiral's life only becomes abundant in his later years when she was dead, when he had re-married and begotten a second family. All that can be said about her may be summed up in a few words. Her name was Jane; she married Rodney in 1753, and

died in 1757, having borne him two sons and a daughter. The elder of the two sons, afterwards an officer in the Guards, was the ancestor of the present Lords Rodney. The younger went to sea, and was drowned in the wreck of his sloop, the *Ferret*. The daughter died in childhood.

In 1751, too, Rodney had entered Parliament as member for Saltash, which means that he was put into the seat by a patron. It was the first of five seats which he held, with an interval of exclusion from the House between the fourth and last, until he was made a peer in 1782. His Parliamentary adventures will, however, be more conveniently taken farther on.

With a wife and a seat in Parliament Rodney would have no present wish to go to sea, nor would his political patron wish him to be too much away. It was convenient to have him at hand if a critical division was expected. A guardship at Portsmouth would meet the case exactly, and accordingly he was appointed in 1753 to the *Kent*, sixty-four. Very soon, in the next year in fact, this vessel was commissioned for service in the East Indies, and then Rodney was moved into the *Fougueux*; and when she also was commissioned, he moved in 1755 yet again to the *Prince George*, still on guardship duty. In the earlier part of this time there was little beyond routine to attend to, but in the last-named year began the preparations for the Seven Years' War. We were strengthening our hands in the East Indies, and Boscawen's fleet was being got ready for that attack on the French-American fishing fleet which was our not formal, but effective, declaration of hostilities. Under these circumstances it was necessary

to raise men for the fleet, and no small part of that duty fell to the captains of the guardships.

The men were procured in two ways—by persuasion and by force. A bounty was offered for seamen; landsmen, of whom a good proportion was carried in every ship, were not then entitled to this advantage. When free enlistment failed to supply sufficient crews, and it always did in war, recourse was had to the press. Even if there had been a reasonable security that enough men would ultimately come in, some quicker process than the volunteer one was needed. The quicker process was compulsion, pure and simple. As the press-gang, though a familiar name enough, is but vaguely known in these days, some little account of Rodney's share in the working of it may not come amiss. There is no reason to suppose that his activity differed from that of others in nature or degree, but yet some sketch of it will help us to realise the surroundings in which he worked. The letter book, already quoted, supplies some characteristic facts.

His volunteers having first been secured, the captain of the *Prince George* selects from them and from the sailors who habitually enlisted in the navy, of whom there was always a backbone in the service, certain trusty gangs which he puts under active officers. One of these, a Lieutenant Allon, was sent to London to set up a *rendezvous*, under the direction of the registering captain, probably in the neighbourhood of Limehouse or Wapping. From this centre of activity the lieutenant went to work, recruiting men freely when he could, or laying hands on them in the fashion described in *Roderick Random*. Lieutenant Allon's requests for more "imprest" money were frequent, and were regu-

larly answered with remittances. When he had secured a haul of men he sent them round by tenders to Portsmouth. It is curious to reflect that Lieutenant Allon and, through him, Rodney helped to secure Captain Cook for the navy. The navigator enlisted at this very time in order to escape the "hot press" on the river, deciding, like the long-headed Yorkshireman he was, that he had better go quietly, get the bounty, and likewise secure a chance of promotion, than be seized as pressed man, for whom there would be no bounty and no chance. So it will be seen the press-gang worked indirectly as well as directly. In the meantime other gangs were at work in the fashion indicated by this little order, which is addressed on February 14th, 1755, to Lieutenant Richard Bickorton.

You are hereby required and directed to proceed on board the *Frederick and William* tender, taking with you forty men from His Majesty's ship under my command, and immediately proceed to the eastward of the Isle of Wight, and cruise for the space of eight days between that island and Beachy Head, using your best endeavours to impress or otherwise procure all such seamen as you possibly can for His Majesty's service. At the expiration of eight days you are to return to Spithead for further orders. Given under my hand February 14th. G. B. R.

Lieutenant Bickorton was one of many officers in command of the tenders then swarming in the Channel, waiting all of them for the homeward-bound merchant ships and their crews, which were returning in ignorance of what was waiting for them. One can imagine the feelings of the merchant sailors when they were stopped in sight of shore, and carried off to serve King George for nobody knew how long, without as much as an hour

given them to put a foot on dry land. A letter written by Rodney in June of this year to Sir Edward Hawke, now commanding at Portsmouth, will show what one crew thought of it all.

Sir—Lieutenant Robert Sax of His Majesty's ship under my command, who was sent on board the *Princess Augusta* tender in order to procure seamen for His Majesty's service, is returned this morning with fifteen men which he pressed out of the *Britannia*, a ship from Leghorn bound for London. He acquaints me he fell in with the said ship at 5 o'clock in the morning on June 1st off Portland, and ordered them to bring to. The master desired he would defer pressing the men till they got out of the Race of Portland—to which desire of the master's Mr. Sax acquiesced ; but observing after they got out of the Race of Portland the ship continued to crowd all the sail she possibly could set, Mr. Sax fired a shot athwart her, and ordered them to bring to again, upon which the master of the *Britannia* hailed the tender and acquainted the Lieutenant that his men refused to obey his commands, and desired the said Lieutenant would board him. Mr. Sax after acquainting the men several times the Channel was full of tenders, and that it was not possible for them to escape being pressed, and could not prevail upon them to submit, they answered with three cheers, and fired a shot at him, on which Mr. Sax boarded them with the tender ; but [I] am sorry to acquaint you three men on board the said ship was killed in boarding, tho' Mr. Sax assures me he gave positive orders to his men not to fire. The ship is now come into Spithead, and I shall take particular just care to send a sufficient number of good and able men to navigate her to London. I should be glad to receive your directions how I am to proceed in this affair, and what is to be done with the men that was killed, as I find they are still on board.

Rodney's composition was hasty, or his clerk's copying was careless, as we may see from the two sentences jumbled into one in the middle of his letter ("the men that was" is quite good grammar of the time), but the

meaning is clear enough. Composition and meaning are alike luminous in Hawke's answer.

> By Sir Edward Hawke, Knight of the Bath, Vice-Admiral of the White Squadron, and Commander of His Majesty's ships and vessels at Spithead and Portsmouth Harbour,
>
> You are hereby required and directed to cause the utmost despatch to be used by the surgeons to whom the accompanying order is directed in finishing their examination of the wounds of the three men killed the 1st inst. on board the *Britannia* merchant ship. Then you are without a moment's loss of time to put on board her men sufficient in number and quality to navigate her in safety to her moorings in the river Thames, directing them as soon as they get without St. Helen's to throw the dead bodies overboard. For which this shall be your order.
>
> Given under my hand on board His Majesty's ship *St. George* at Spithead, this June 2nd 1755.
>
> ED. HAWKE.

This brief official letter, and the laconic order which is its answer, bring before one, all the more effectively because of their business-like calm, the most cruel phase of the press-gang. It was necessary, no doubt, that men should be found for the defence of the country, and at all times in all nations the State has compelled the service of its subjects. At this time the French had (as they still have) an *inscription maritime*, which spares no part of the maritime population; and nobody needs to be told in these days that the obligation to render military service is universal in nearly all the nations of the old world. But a conscription works on a definite system. The burden it imposes is known, foreseen, and adjusted with some approach to equality and justice. The press-gang was utterly erratic. It was, in fact, a

survival of the prerogative by which Edward the Third could order the Lords Marchers to bring up just as many Welshmen as he wanted for his French wars. Time and the growth of the "freedom of the subject" had limited the incidence of the prerogative (if the expression is permissible) to the levies for the sea service, but in that restricted though still considerable field it worked as it had done in the fourteenth century. Men were seized wherever they could be found, with little or no regard to aught save the convenience of the service. As a matter of course, the easiest thing to do was to wait for the home-coming merchant ships, and take the men out of them close to port. This could be done without stopping the trade, and so raising a clamour among the merchants who possessed a vote. Moreover, it saved the press-gangs an immense amount of trouble in hunting for men in the back streets of towns and on the high roads. For the sailors seized in this fashion at the end of a long sea voyage it was a cruel fate, and one's heart is sore for the three poor fellows who only came back to the sight of Portland Bill to die by the hands of their own countrymen.

The tone of the letters, too, is not unworthy of notice. There is no anger in Rodney's mind with the sailors of the *Britannia* for resisting. That was "the game"; and if he feels aught, it is annoyance that Sax's men disobeyed orders, and regret that three stout sailors, who might have been used in the *Prince George's* tops and batteries, should be lying stiff and stark on the merchant ship's deck, waiting to be thrown to the fishes off St. Helen's. Noteworthy, too, is Sir Edward Hawke's summary decision that there shall be no coroner's

inquest to start unpleasant inquiries. There shall be no bodies for the jury to sit on. Such were the freedom of the seafaring subject and the sanctity of the law as understood by post-captains and vice-admirals of the blue, white, and red squadrons in 1755 and for long afterwards. No wonder that desertions were incessant, or that in this year Rodney has to receive on board the *Prince George* a company of "Colonel Bockland's regiment of foot" to stand sentry over his pressed men. Haslar Hospital was a common "take off" for desertions. It was full in those times when complaints were common from every ship in the Channel that there are not slops enough, so that the men are naked, and in want of every necessary; that the beef is bad, the beer sour, the cheese and butter "stinking rotten." From it the men ran in such numbers that the leakage threatened to counterbalance the inflow due to the press. On the top of the press warrants came orders to Lieutenant This and Mr. That, midshipman, to take so many trusty men, and with them keep watch and ward round Haslar to shut in the convalescent men who might try to make a run for the free air of the South Down. One touch more and we can be done with the press-gang. When in the following year Rodney had been transferred to the *Monarch*, seventy-four, and was lying at Plymouth, he reports in an official letter that many sailors use the high road by Wendover in going from port to port. He suggests the despatch of a lieutenant and a dozen trusty men to set up a *rendezvous* on the road, and catch the seamen in transit. The merchant sailor was hunted like the flying-fish. Clearly Rodney was a zealous officer, and whether he liked this kidnapping work or

not he did it without shrinking. Probably he neither liked nor disliked it, but just did it as a matter of course. As for the men, they too took it as part of the incurable nature of things. They might give three cheers, and fire a gun, or knock the press sailors down, or desert if they could, but once in the mess, after a reasonable amount of cursing and storming they settled down. The fund of loyalty in the country was immense. They laid the blame of the misfortune on the French, and prepared to take it out of the hereditary enemy. The country in the meantime clung to the press out of the abundance of its love for the freedom of the subject. A proposal to replace it by a registration of seamen, made in Walpole's time, was rejected indignantly because of the increased power it would give the administration. In a muddle-headed way the country was right, given the point of view. It was better to tolerate the survival of an old and now limited prerogative as an evil necessity than to give Government power to register men and call them out in classes. That would have been a recognition of a principle and a serious concession.

In 1755 Rodney was transferred from the *Prince George* to the *Monarch*, and from Portsmouth to Plymouth. During the first half of the next year he was in this latter ship and port, engaged in much the same work as before. Fighting had begun not only in America, but in the Mediterranean, to which Byng sailed this year on his disastrous expedition to Minorca, but there was no formal declaration of war till May, 1756. At Plymouth, Rodney came across an illustration of the barbarity of the time not inferior to the press-gang, which also he doubtless accepted as a matter of course. We had stopped a

French emigrant vessel, apparently before the declaration, bound to Louisiana with Alsatian emigrants. Louisiana meant then the valley of the Mississippi, and as much to right or left of it as the French could seize. It would never do to allow them to increase their number if it could be prevented. There was no peace beyond the line—to the west that is of the line drawn from north to south, three hundred and seventy leagues to the west of the Cape de Verd Islands. So, though we were nominally at peace with France, the emigrants were stopped in the Channel by a kind of application, I take it, of the *Cyprès* doctrine. Among them were some twenty women and children, whom Rodney was ordered to send over to Ostend in a tender. The poor creatures petitioned to be allowed to remain with their husbands, promising to share the subsistence allowed the men by the French King. What answer was given I do not know, but it is characteristic of the slovenly inhumanity of the day that we should, after stopping these poor people, have calmly proposed to separate the wives from their husbands, and send them to beg or starve at Ostend—and have done that too, as was no doubt the case, under the impression that it was the good-natured thing to do. The British official man of the middle of the eighteenth century was above all things a very great ass. He was not so corrupt as he has been called; he could work very hard, was conscious of the duty he owed his king and country. Nobody, I think, can look at the evidence and doubt that he tried his best, but it was absurdly bad, for being an ass what could he do but administer in an asinine manner?

It is worth while to insist a little on this, because,

unless you know the element in which a man swam, it is impossible to estimate his swimming. In 1755 that element was for naval officers one of official incoherence and incompetence. Contradictory orders with their inevitable consequences, which are omissions, and confusion, abounded. Men and officers were drafted from ship to ship according to what Nelson called "the infernal system" which prevailed too long in our navy. There seemed to be no plan at headquarters, or, what is even worse, several plans at once. To take a comparatively small detail as illustrating the working of the Navy Board. When in July the *Monarch* was ordered to sea to join Boscawen, now cruising in the Channel, Rodney is found at the very last moment applying for a third surgeon who had been promised to him, but had not turned up. He did not come, but in place of him a consoling letter from the senior officer at Plymouth informing Rodney that the *Monarch* would be better without him, for he had turned out on inquiry to be entirely ignorant of a surgeon's business, and only seventeen years old. With that instance of official management we may leave the subject. That we pulled through it all is entirely due to the one redeeming merit our administration had. It did leave a very large share of power to the admirals and captains. When they were of the right stamp—admirals such as Hawke and Boscawen, captains of the order of Rodney and Hood, or the less famous Lockhart and Gilchrist, who were engaged in this and the following wars in snapping up the French cruisers and privateers as fast as they showed a bowsprit in the Channel—order and efficiency were soon evoked out of chaos. Of course when the com-

mander was of the wrong stamp—when he was a Byng, who looked upon official mismanagement, not as a thing to be made good, but as mere matter of complaint and excuse for doing nothing, the result was very different. The fate which overtook Byng convinced every officer, however, that it was safer as well as more honourable to follow the example of Hawke and Boscawen. The naval officers and the great kindred spirit of Pitt, the master of them all, saved the country in spite of officialdom by sheer dint of playing the man.

In the July of 1756 the *Monarch* joined Boscawen in Channel soundings for a short time. She had only been with him a few days when the carpenter, "a very good man," who had been warned to present no frivolous complaints, had to report that the "knee of the head" was loose, and worked so much as to cause the ship to leak dangerously. There was nothing for it but to apply to the Admiral for a survey. The result of the report of the surveyors was an order to the *Monarch* to return to Portsmouth to refit. Rodney spent the remainder of the year and the beginning of the next in the dockyard. He contrived to get some good out of the evil state of the *Monarch* by inducing the dockyard authorities to alter the internal arrangement of the ship, which was a French prize, and had her magazines in the wrong place. Whatever good the alteration may have done the *Monarch*, the advantage of it was reaped by another captain. About the end of February Rodney was transferred to the *Dublin*, which makes the fifth ship he had commanded in four years. One wonders how any kind of discipline and good spirit was maintained in the midst of these incessant changes.

Almost the last order given him on board the *Monarch* was one by Admiral Thomas Smith, "Tom of Ten Thousand," directing him to receive on board, as "supernumeraries for their victuals only," Rear-Admiral Byng and his retinue. It is dated February 6th, 1757. On the 17th of the next month poor Byng, having now no need to think and act, but only to undergo his fate, faced the firing-party on the *Monarch's* quarter-deck like a gentleman, without fear and without ostentation. Rodney had no share, direct or indirect, in the trial or execution of the Admiral, but I have come to a very mistaken estimate of his character if he disapproved it. No man had less of the querulous spirit, which was Byng's ruin, or less toleration for such half-hearted leadership as was shown in the fight off Minorca. If he ever saw, as he probably did, Voltaire's famous jest, he replied, no doubt, that the execution did "encourage the others." It set up a terrible warning to those who might in future feel inclined to think that if they were badly treated by the Admiralty they were therefore to be excused for not doing their best against the enemy.

Rodney's new ship the *Dublin* lay at Deptford, and he was now to begin all over again the weary work of fitting for sea. According to the wholesome custom of the navy he was allowed to bring with him a few chosen officers and men to form the heart of a new crew. From April to August then we will suppose him at work as before, setting up a *rendezvous*, superintending the rigging of his new ship, dunning the Admiralty for slops to clothe his naked men, and food not "stinking rotten" for them to eat. Since the little picturesque touch is always welcome, we will note that he applies

among other things to the Admiralty for a cook's warrant for "Charles O'Raaf," hardly an Englishman we should think, who had lost his arm in an action with the French in 1747. In September he had at last got his ship into shape and joined Hawke, now back from the Mediterranean, whither he had gone to supersede Byng, and preparing for the first of those combined attacks on the coast of France which were the least successful of the Great Commoner's enterprises.

The history of the attack on Rochefort, which was made in September, may be quite fairly given in the words of Captain Marryat. "The army thought that the navy might have beaten down stone ramparts, ten feet thick; and the navy wondered why the army had not walked up the same ramparts which were thirty feet perpendicular." Sir Edward Hawke, who commanded the fleet, was as capable an officer as ever hoisted his flag—and Wolfe was with the troops. The two, if they had been at liberty to act together, might have effected something, but unfortunately Wolfe was still only Lieutenant-Colonel in Kingsley's regiment. The General in command, Sir John Mordaunt, was old and by no means competent. His personal bravery was nearly the only soldierly quality he had, and though he did not fear death he stood in terror of responsibility. With such a leader an expedition which required dashing management was sure to fail, and fail it did. Whatever credit was gained fell to Howe in the *Magnanime*, and then the squadron and the troops came back with very little glory, but with ample materials for a court of inquiry and a pamphleteering war. Rodney took no part in this last, and had

no conspicuous share in the previous operations. The *Dublin* was in truth a wretched ship. Immediately after joining the squadrons he lost company because her rudder had got out of order. Soon, too, Rodney had to represent to the Admiral that a hundred and fifty of his men were down with an epidemic fever, while many others were so weak as to be unfit for work. To make good the defects of his vessel, and to recruit his crew, he was ordered back to Spithead.

In May of 1758 he sailed on a much more satisfactory piece of service. The *Dublin* was ordered to join Boscawen in the attack on Louisburg in Cape Breton. She was sent in place of the *Invincible*, which had just been lost. After experiencing repeated delays, and a long struggle with the difficulty of manning his ship—to make his complement up at all it was found necessary to enlist "neutral" prisoners who volunteered—he got off at last with a convoy. General Amherst and his staff sailed in the *Dublin*, which was in fact crowded with soldiers and stores.

The siege and capture of Louisburg marked the turning of the tide for us in the Seven Years' War. It was the first completely successful thing we did. It gave us the command of the mouth of the St. Lawrence, and was a decisive step towards the final conquest of Canada. Navy and army, Boscawen and Amherst, worked admirably together, and Wolfe, who was here also, had some opportunity to show his great qualities as a leader. It would be pleasing to his biographer to be able to say that Rodney had a conspicuous share in the victory; but the truth is that during the greater part of the actual fighting the *Dublin* was at Halifax. She

maintained her character as an unhealthy ship, and was hardly on the North American coast before the epidemic fever broke out again. Boscawen kept her mostly at Halifax, where Rodney had to discharge the very important but somewhat thankless duties of officer in command at the basis of operations. What part of his attention could be spared from forwarding transports was devoted to looking after the health of his men. The hospitals of Halifax were full of sickly sailors or soldiers, and the *Dublin's* men had to be attended to in sheds run up on shore by the ship's carpenter. Rodney rejoined Boscawen outside Louisburg just before it surrendered in July, and then sailed for Europe on August 15th with the convoy which carried the French prisoners of war. The room which had been taken up on board the *Dublin* on her way out by Amherst and his staff, was occupied on the way home by the officers of the eight French ships which were captured in the harbour. It is a not uninteresting detail that Rodney also took home a present of dried fish and Madeira from Wolfe to his family. One would like to know that the men were friends as they were certainly acquaintances.

The choice of the *Dublin* to attend the convoy was not only due to the fact that she was the kind of vessel an admiral would be naturally anxious to get rid of. Rodney was now a very senior captain, and would as a matter almost of course be selected for independent service for which a flag-officer could not be spared. He was now almost at the very end of his service as post-captain. When he had brought his convoy into the Channel and had sent it into Plymouth he proceeded to Spithead himself, and there applied for leave to attend

to his health. A year spent on board a very ill-ventilated vessel reeking with fever had been too much for him. The leave was granted, and there ended Rodney's work as a post-captain. In May of 1759 he was promoted rear-admiral.

CHAPTER IV

FLAG RANK AND PARLIAMENT

WHEN Rodney became a rear-admiral he had already been in Parliament for eight years. No word good or bad need be said of his career as a member in the House, for it had necessarily been, and was to continue to be, insignificant. The truth is that he valued his seat for social and professional reasons. It has always been a pleasant thing for a gentleman to be a member of the House, and at that time the best club in England was particularly agreeable. The work demanded was as much as you chose to do, and the privileges were many. For a naval or military officer a seat was especially valuable. When Rodney was on his way from the relief of Gibraltar to his third command in the West Indies in 1779, he wrote to his second wife a letter, in which he said that no man could hope to hold a satisfactory position in the navy unless he had a seat in Parliament. His meaning is easy to understand. A naval officer who was also a member had in the first place a much better chance of obtaining a command than another, and in the second, was much more likely to be well backed up when he was in it. The possession of a vote which might be used to support or annoy a minister would give him an

independent position, or at least a claim. Moreover, his mouth could not be shut. The calculation was a convincing one, and therefore His Majesty's sea officers went into the House as much as they could. Indeed, the number of admirals and captains who were members of Parliament in the early and middle eighteenth century was large. The Treasury and Admiralty made a similar calculation for their part. If it was convenient for a naval officer to have a seat, it was equally useful to ministers that many members should belong to a body of gentlemen who might be soothed by the prospect of command, or kept in order by fear of the loss of place. Naval officers were therefore commonly chosen as Treasury candidates (*i.e.* nominees) for dockyard seats, or for the pocket boroughs in the west. So there was between ministers and naval officers not a little of that mutually advantageous give-and-take by which His Majesty's Government was so largely carried on in the last century.

Rodney, with the sagacity of a practical man, had early seen the advantage of obtaining a seat in Parliament, to say nothing of the fact that as a gentleman of good connections he would naturally wish to be in the House if possible. For one who, like himself, could not cultivate popularity there were three ways in which his useful seat might be obtained. An officer might belong to a great family with plenty of "influence" of its own. This—the best—was Boscawen's position. "Old Dreadnaught," as the sailors called him, had largely to thank the fact that he was Lord Falmouth's brother and M.P. for Truro for the commands which enabled him to destroy M. de la Clue at Lagos, and to help in the

taking of Louisburg. Another way was to inherit or make money enough to "cultivate an interest," as the process was politely called, in some properly constituted borough. The third way was to attach yourself to a patron and follow him. It was the tamer eighteenth-century equivalent of the alliance recorded in the *Fair Maid of Perth* which bound the stout Laird of Wamphray to ride with the redoubted Lord of Johnstone, who again was banded with the doughty Earl of Douglas. In the meantime the Devil's Deck of Hellgarth was employed in looking after the borough.

Not having family influence or private fortune enough, or of the right kind in the right place, and being withal resolute to get on in this world by all means permissible to a gentleman, Rodney had nothing for it but to attach himself to a patron. With what Carlyle would doubtless have praised as showing a certain veracity of intellect, he recognised the conditions of the game and played it resolutely. He sat for Saltash in Cornwall as nominee of John Clevland, the Clerk of the Admiralty. Clevland, a Cornishman of Scotch descent, owned Saltash by inheritance, and used it with judgment to push his own fortunes in the world. To give the seat to a naval officer was for him an obviously convenient way of making it serve that end. In 1751 it was Rodney who was selected, while he was in command of the *Rainbow* on the Newfoundland station. Doubtless, Mr. Clevland's protection helped to make him a more acceptable suitor for the hand of Miss Jane Compton, and beyond all question it helped him to his successive commands of the *Kent*, the *Fougueux*, the *Prince George*, and the *Monarch*.

Before 1759 Rodney, however, had secured a greater

and more powerful patron than Clevland. I have already quoted the passage of one of his letters in which he thanked the Duke of Newcastle for all his preferment in the service. It was to the Duke that he owed his seat at Okehampton in this year. There does not appear to have been any quarrel with Clevland, but no doubt reasons judged sufficient by all the gentlemen concerned made it desirable to give Saltash to somebody else. For the rest, Newcastle was distinctly a patron worth having. He would, in this alliance, play doughty Earl of Douglas to Clevland's Lord of Johnstone and Rodney's Laird of Wamphray. It was promotion for the Laird to deal directly with the Earl. Between 1751 and 1759 there is evidence to show that Rodney was employed as negotiator in confidential transactions between Newcastle and the Earl of Northampton. He did not come empty-handed to the alliance. Rodney had his own "plump of spears," in the form of some Parliamentary interest in Hampshire, acquired probably by his first marriage, which was at the minister's disposal in return for the proper consideration. Still there can be no sort of doubt as to the relations between the men. They are indicated in a letter dated "Spithead, December 2nd, 1759," which lies written in Rodney's large, flowing, but slightly gouty handwriting in the Newcastle correspondence.

"My Lord," he begins, "I beg Your Grace will permit me to return you my most sincere thanks for the Honour you have bestowed on me in chusing me a Member of Parliament for Okehampton. A steady adherence to Your Grace's commands shall ever distinguish me while I have a seat in the House." Then after a few words of

congratulation on Hawke's recent magnificent victory off Quiberon, he ends, "I have the Honour to be with the utmost Respect and Gratitude Your Grace's most Devoted and most obedient humble Servant, G. B. Rodney." The style of the time allowed a gentleman to write in this submissive way, but it was a gentleman who was protected writing to his protector. That this was the footing on which the Admiral stood to the Duke he never attempts to conceal, nor is there the slightest reason to suppose that he saw aught undignified in it. There is something respectable in the honesty with which he tells the naked truth as to his election for Okehampton.

The Parliament he joined in this year did not last long. It was dissolved by the death of George the Second in 1760, and a general election was made necessary. At once Rodney hastened to put his Parliamentary influence in Hampshire at the minister's command. He did not again sit for Okehampton, but for Penryn. It appears, from a very piteous letter of Rodney's to West of the Admiralty, written in February, 1761, that Okehampton was wanted for a Mr. Wenman Coke who was to be elected "on the interest" of Mr. Thomas Pitt. Rodney asks West in anguish to tell him, "for God's sake," what he has done "to gain His Grace's displeasure," which is the harder to bear because he came in only to serve His Grace, and wishes to "continue on no other foundation." West stood his friend, and the Admiral was sent down to contest Penryn, where Clive was spending his Indian booty in "making himself an interest." Rodney, though his reputation was as yet small, not only in comparison with what it was destined

to be, but with that of several of his contemporaries, was a distinguished naval officer, and Cornwall liked naval officers. He could, moreover, pay part at least of his expenses. It may be, too, that the death of Admiral Boscawen in the January of this year opened the way for Rodney by removing the natural candidate of the important Falmouth family. However that may be, Rodney went down supported by the Boscawens and the Edgcumbes, and recommended by His Grace. The contest is the subject of a letter of his to his patron, which is so characteristic of the man and the time that I shall quote it bodily.

PENRYN, *March 25th*, 1761.

MY LORD—I must beg leave to lay before Your Grace the present situation of affairs at this place, where I arrived on Sunday last, and hence in company with Lord Falmouth and Mr. Edgcumbe canvassed the town.

We find at present but a small majority owing to the defection of several officers in the customs and salt office, both here and at Falmouth, as likewise two men belonging to the Pacquets, who are all obstinate in opposition, the Agents of the other party having had the presumption to read a letter as from Your Grace, which has deluded these people so much that Mr. West's letter signifying Your Grace's pleasure had not the least effect. I must therefore join with Lord Falmouth and Mr. Edgcumbe for the Dismission of one Charles Robbins, a Tydesman, etc., at Falmouth, which may have the desired effect on the other officers.

I must now take the liberty to point out to Your Grace a measure which I am sure will infallibly secure the election, and which I most earnestly entreat may take place immediately, as it will convince the people in general (whose minds have been poisoned with different notions) that I have the honour to be nominated by Your Grace as candidate.

Captain Peard of the *Savage* sloop of war, a Freeman of this Town, whose friends have great influence, has been offer'd by the adversaries a bond of one thousand pounds,

and that they will procure him a Post Ship ; he has resisted the temptation, and continues firm.

If Your Grace will make it a Point that it may appear here before the election that Captain Peard has post, I am sure all difficulties will be removed. My ship, the *Marlborough*, has no captain appointed as yet.

From Your Grace's firm friendship to me I cannot doubt but you will grant me this further mark of your favours, as I shall always continue to be with the utmost gratitude and respect Your Graces most obedient and most humble Servant, G. B. RODNEY.

Thus did they consult the voice of the people in 1761. Whether Charles Robbins was dismissed, and Captain Peard had post, I do not know, and it does not greatly matter. Probably they were respectively punished and preferred, for Rodney was duly elected and returned to Parliament once more as one of the trusty band of gentlemen who enabled the "noodle of Newcastle" first to impose himself on the great Pitt and then to trip up his heels.

It is to be wished that some more heroic tale had to be told of Rodney as a Parliament man, but even from a biographer a decent measure of respect for fact is required, and the honest truth is that Rodney was one of the "items" which made up the sum of political strength in the hand of His Grace of Newcastle. There was in his case no shadow of that comely pretence of a regard for the principles of a party which was exacted from the nominee to a pocket borough in the last years of the old system. He did not profess to take a seat in order to fight for his principles. He struggled for one in order to push his fortunes, and in order to get the seat he made himself the humble servant to command

of the silliest and basest of the politicians of the eighteenth century. Whatever amount of stain this may be supposed to inflict on his character must, it is to be feared, remain there.

On the other hand, there is something to be said about the extent and nature of that stain. A man is to be judged by the morality of his time, and beyond all doubt that morality permitted Rodney to do what he did. To attach yourself to the Duke of Newcastle or any other patron was not thought to be an act deserving praise, but it was permissible without too much loss of character. It was only one of the many compromises which are necessary in life. If his patron had been other than Newcastle, who could not be served except by those who were prepared to subordinate in things Parliamentary all principle and patriotism to the interest of their patron, there would to a humane judge be no stain on his character at all. As it was, he followed many others to do a thing made disgraceful by the character of his leader, and I greatly fear that he never woke up to the real nature of his course, but remained to the end of his life convinced that a gentleman might, without loss of character, profess himself the "man" of such a one as His Grace of Newcastle in order to earn place by that act of homage. Here, again, a consideration on the other side suggests itself. It is this, that Rodney's conduct differed rather in certain superficial matters of form, than in kind, from that of gentlemen of mark in the political world of to-day. There are many who would now make to a caucus that promise of unconditional obedience which he made to Newcastle, and would never be called con-

temptuous names for so doing except in the criticism of the other side, which is a matter of course, and, by the way, did not spare the led captains of the electioneering duke. Which of the two forms of slavery is the more ignoble is a question to be settled rather by the taste than the reason. There are who would think it more shameful to be horsewhipped by a gentleman single-handed than to be dragged through a horse-pond by a mob. To the fastidious either experience is unpleasant. For the rest it was true in 1761, as it had been before and has been since, that "The rising unto *Place* is laborious; and by Pains men come to greater Pains; and it is sometimes base; and by Indignities men come to *Dignities*." A man, too, ranks rather by what he does with his dignity when it has been won, than by what he does to win it. Now, it cannot be denied that if Rodney stooped somewhat to pick up command, he exercised it for the good of his country and the confusion of her enemies.

His electioneering adventures have been allowed to slightly overlap his services at sea. Between his election for Okehampton and his return—as Clive's fellow-member, by the way—for Penryn he did a good stroke of service in the Channel. The French were busy in 1759 in preparing a great invasion of England. Flat-bottomed boats, such as were afterwards to reappear on a much more imposing scale in the Napoleonic wars, were being built all along the Channel. A powerful fleet was getting ready at Brest, and a smaller force at Rochefort. On our side Sir Edward Hawke had been told off to watch Brest, and Commodore Duff to pen in the Rochefort squadron. Rodney, now Rear-Admiral of the Blue, was

despatched with one sixty-gun ship, the *Achilles*, and half a score of fifty-gun ships, frigates, and sloops, aided by six-bomb ketches, to answer for the flat-bottomed boats in the Channel ports. The work was smartly and thoroughly done in the month of July. Some of the flat-bottomed boats which, under convoy of a galley, endeavoured to escape from the Seine, and creep along the coast to Brest, were cut off at Cape Bassin and driven on shore. Havre was bombarded with success, and numbers of flat-bottomed boats were destroyed, together with great quantities of the stores collected for the proposed invasion. The destruction can hardly have been complete, and was probably not even so extensive as the English supposed. It was enough, however, to deal the French a shrewd blow. When Rodney returned to port he had greatly relieved the fears of his countrymen, and had raised his own reputation considerably. Before the close of the year Hawke's victory over Conflans near Quiberon had broken the back of any possible scheme of invasion as effectually as Trafalgar was to do half a century or so later. It is not without interest to note that during these operations Rodney had under his command Captain Samuel Hood of the *Vestal* frigate, who was to be his second in the battle off Dominica. When he wished to direct the inshore operations in shallower water than could be safely navigated by the *Achilles*, Rodney hoisted his flag in the *Vestal*. The two men now began a friendship which, if it was not quite proof against the strain of rivalry in the future—in the heart of one if not of both—was never openly broken. Rodney must have learned the undoubted capacity of Hood.

The remainder of 1759, the whole of 1760, and the

early part of 1761 were passed either in watch and ward in the Channel, or in circumventing the "adversary" at Penryn. In the last-named year Rodney sailed with a considerable squadron as Admiral on the Barbadoes and Leeward station. Here he remained until the Peace of Fontainebleau in 1763. His services in these two years were divided between co-operating with General Moncton in the conquest of the French Caribbean Islands, and preparing the way for the great expedition of Pocock and Albemarle to the Havannah. Neither part of this service need be repeated here at any length. The French were in these wars so completely beaten from the sea that an English admiral engaged on such work as Rodney's had little more to do than to superintend the transport of troops, to see them safely landed, and to organise naval brigades to co-operate with them when on shore. The work was thoroughly done. Navy and army helped one another in the proper way, and Martinique, which had repelled an attack in 1759, soon fell. Other islands followed, and the French were driven from all their possessions in the West Indies except Hayti. That they were able to use them against us in the American War which lay ahead was not the fault of the fighting men, naval or military. The islands were restored by the diplomatists as a set-off for Canada, which we retained, thereby removing that fear of French aggression which had hitherto been the main ingredient in the loyalty of the plantations to the mother-country.

During the conquest of the French islands Rodney regularly reported progress to his patron of Newcastle, and did it, too, with details which show that he had

measured His Grace's foot to a hairbreadth. Writing for instance to Newcastle from Fort Royal Bay in Martinique to give the good news of the conquest, and point out how advantageous it will be for His Majesty's service, he does not fail to insist how useful it may also be to Thomas Pelham. "I have likewise," he says, "great satisfaction when I consider that the conquest puts it into Your Grace's power to oblige many of your Friends by the Posts and Employments in Your Grace's gift, and which are very lucrative in this Island, particularly those relative to the customs and Secretary of the Island. This I thought my duty to represent to Your Grace that you might not be deceived in their values, which are computed at four thousand pounds a year each. If I have the good fortune to continue in Your Grace's esteem, and that my conduct in this expedition meets with Your Grace's approbation, I shall be extremely happy, as among Your Grace's many friends none is more truly so than him who has the honour to be with the most profound respect and gratitude, etc. etc."

Rodney was not a man to do things by halves, whether it was fighting the French or cultivating his interest with the Duke of Newcastle. Also he was clearly a man of the eighteenth century when the need, not to say the imperative social duty, of obliging one's friends was much borne in on governing persons. So, having beaten the French in a workmanlike style, he hastens to call His Grace's attention to these two important facts—first, that there are places of dignity and emolument to give away, and second, that here is George Brydges Rodney, His Grace's humble and grateful servant. Then he leaves him to perpend.

If Rodney cherished any hope of good things to be obtained by the help of Newcastle in the West Indies he was to be disappointed. In more ways than one his command in these wars was less good than he might reasonably have expected. A grant of land in one of the conquered islands turned out to be mere fairy gold. It had not been confirmed in time, and with the retrocession of our conquests any chance of making it good disappeared. Rodney had to complain, too, that General Moncton and the military gentlemen, particularly those of them who belonged to the North American plantations, had secured an undue share of the prize-money. He accused them of underhand dealings with the enemy, and not without good grounds. Owing to these dubious transactions of theirs, the naval officers, he complained, did not get their fair share. All this business of prize-money, and the division of it, plays a very important part in the history of the navy for as long as there were wars in which booty was to be earned. The desire to obtain it was a great motive with both officers and men. Lord Dundonald has left it on record that a captain who had a reputation for luck never had any difficulty in finding volunteers to man his ship, even when the most severe use had to be made of the press to complete the complement of other ships. In so far the acts for the encouragement of seamen, which recognised and satisfied this natural human love of occasional lumps of extra money, served the purpose for which they were designed. But their influence was by no means wholly for good. Our fathers were much of Cassio's mind. They took it for granted that the lieutenant was to be enriched before the fore-mast hand, the

captain before the lieutenant, and the admiral before the captain. When the man got a few pounds, just enough to keep him drunk for a fortnight, the lieutenant gained a few score, the captain a few hundreds, the admiral gained thousands, for he shared in all the prizes taken on his station, whether he had been present at the capture or not. It is therefore easy to see what an important matter prize-money was to a flag-officer. To get a rich station, and to keep it free from the intrusion of a superior, was the ideal of luck. Unless an admiral was a very magnanimous man indeed, or the pressure of the time was so great as to silence the voice of interest, he was sorely tempted to allow the cause of his pocket to interfere with public service. He was certain to be very angry if a brother-admiral of senior rank turned up to share the booty, and never failed to take advantage of every technical excuse which could be found for disputing the claims of a colleague. How intensely these old heroes resented the diminution of their "loot," with what honest natural rancour they would fight over it, let a long series of quarrels and lawsuits, conducted with all the pertinacity of Dandie Dinmont, say. In the heart of such as fight on blue water there has always lingered a something of the pirate—they have a smack, they do somewhat grow to, as we shall see when this story has gone a little farther.

The meaning of this same word prize-money must be kept in mind in order to appreciate the full bitterness of the disappointment which fell upon Rodney in 1762. Spain had openly avowed the Family Compact, and had joined her fortunes with France. The avowal would have been made sooner if Charles the Third had not

waited till the treasure-ships were home from America. By not allowing Pitt to force on a war in time, we gave the Spaniard a chance, which he lost by declaring war himself when France was too broken to afford him any help. At once the news was forwarded to Rodney from Europe, and better he could not have wished for. A war with Spain, as Nelson said, was a rich war; and for nobody was it more lucrative than for the officers in command in the West Indies. They had Cuba and the Spanish main under the lee. There was nothing to be done but to run down before the unfailing Easterly Trades, and there lay the Spanish colonies from which the strong man armed had but to ask with spirit, and to have. Another not unpleasant service was to cruise to windward of the passages through the Caribbean Islands, and there snap up the register ships as they passed. When, then, the news of the Spanish War reached Rodney, he set to work with all the energy of a commander for whom pleasure and duty were combined in an eminent degree. The French were so completely subdued that the English squadron could safely be spared from the Leeward Islands. Rodney decided to strengthen the Jamaica station, which was distinct from his own; and not only so, but to go there himself in order to assist in the defence of the island, in case a combined attack was made on it by the Spaniards and the French, who had recently contrived to smuggle a few ships through the Caribbean Islands to Hayti. In a despatch to the Admiralty he expressed the hope that their lordships would approve of his decision to take this course without waiting for orders. Having wound up his formal duties on the Leeward station, Rodney prepared to run

down to Jamaica, and no doubt every man on board his flagship was looking forward to a slap at the Spaniards and a share of the booty with a natural, and withal honourable, feeling of satisfaction. But at the very last moment there came upon all these tender leaves of hope a frost — a killing frost. On March 26th Captain Elphinstone of the *Richmond* frigate turned up with orders from home. By the despatches brought him Rodney learnt that a great expedition was preparing in England for an attack on Havannah. It was to be commanded by Sir George Pocock. As for him, he was to remain on his station in order that he might render all possible assistance to the expedition as it passed. Rodney obeyed orders punctually. Ten sail of his squadron were sent to Jamaica, and he remained at Antigua collecting stores, water, and information for the use of Sir George Pocock. After delays which might have proved fatal, the great expedition arrived. It was carried by Pocock through the dangerous and then little-known Bahama Channel—a feat which was quoted as a masterpiece of seamanship—and after desperate fighting did take Havannah. The loss of the expedition by disease was heavy; but Pocock and Albemarle, the admiral and general in command, made a handsome fortune each out of the prize-money. Rodney's share in the enterprise was to see his squadron depleted to strengthen Pocock; to have a great deal of work thrown on him; to be left behind at Antigua with the mere carcass of his command, and nothing but routine to attend to; to be, moreover, prostrated by a smart attack of bilious fever. Pocock had taken his best ships and officers, but had left him behind, having no desire that

another flag-officer should come with him to divide the expected plunder.

On this, as on all other occasions, Rodney obeyed orders exactly, and without futile complaint. He was too able—too much a man of the world—to suppose that he could gain anything by showing himself unmanageable; too honourable a man to revenge a private disappointment by neglecting the service; and, above all, too proud a man to make an outcry where he had no quotable grievance. None the less he was disappointed, and did not scruple to say so when a fitting occasion presented itself. He did not do so now because there really was no ground for protest. It was a matter of course that a great expedition should be commanded by an officer of proportionate rank. Pocock was his senior both in rank and length of service. He had lately commanded with fair success in three battles in the East Indies against a superior French force. Rodney could not complain when such a man—whose reputation was then higher than his own—was put over his head. It was for Pocock and the Ministry to decide whether the expedition to Havannah required the presence of the Admiral on the Leeward station. They did not think it did, and so Rodney had to remain at his unremunerative command. Still, to Rodney, who neither was nor pretended to be indifferent to money, it was a disappointment to lose so splendid a chance. Some years afterwards he made it an excuse for a claim to be allowed to retain the governorship of Greenwich Hospital along with an active command at sea. He then plainly told Sandwich that he thought the Government owed him this, which had been granted in the noontide of jobbery

to former admirals, as a compensation for what he had lost in the West Indies in 1762. If this did not sound heroic, it was honest and human. Moreover, it was only what was to be expected. If a government holds out the chance of earning money as an incentive to its officers and men, it must expect that its officers and men will think of money. Rodney did not cant on the subject. He liked money and wished to earn it as easily as possible. His code of honour consisted of two articles. The first was that he was to do his duty; the second was that he was entitled to all the places, pensions, allowances, prize-money, and praise which law, or public opinion, or the customs of society entitled him to get, down to the last farthing. Whoever stood in his way must take the risk of whatever George Brydges Rodney could do to break his neck—always in the way of fair fighting. It was not the code of a saint, or of an unselfish hero; but it was a good working code of honour for a plain man of the world.

CHAPTER V

SIXTEEN YEARS OF PEACE

In 1763 Rodney returned home and hauled down his flag. He did not hoist it again in war time for sixteen years, though in the interval he held a peace command in the West Indies. Before again going to sea—from 1765, in fact, to 1771—he had the governorship of Greenwich Hospital. In 1764 he was made a baronet. In the same year he married for the second time. The lady was apparently of Dutch descent, and by name Henrietta Clies, the daughter of one John Clies of Lisbon, who again was probably a man of business. During these years of quiet he rose steadily in rank. In 1762 he became Vice-Admiral of the Blue, in 1771 Vice-Admiral of the White, and in the following year of the Red. This division of the navy into the Blue, White, and Red Squadrons, which has now been entirely given up, was purely formal in Rodney's own time. It had been invented in the seventeenth century when fleets of eighty or a hundred ships of all sorts and sizes were collected in the North Sea to fight the Dutch. A sub-division had to be made if they were to be handled at all. They were split into three squadrons, which were distinguished by the colour of their ensigns—the blue, now used only by

yachts or naval reserve ships; the red, now used by merchant ships; and the white, the red cross of St. George, which was at all times emphatically known as the English ensign, and is now the flag of the navy. The highest in dignity, though we have named it second here, was the red—the royal colour. Until late in the reign of George the Third, not long before the division was given up altogether, there was no Admiral of the Red Squadron, but only Vice and Rear. Admiral of the White was the highest rank an officer looked to reach. The classification was kept up in theory, because it was supposed to answer to the natural division of all forces into van, centre, and rear, though in practice it was not much attended to. Among the admirals a man's colour simply marked his seniority. It may not be thought out of place to name the successive steps in order. They were—

Rear-Admiral of the Blue—White—Red.
Vice-Admiral of the Blue—White—Red.
Admiral of the Blue—White.

The establishment of the Navy also provided that there should be one Admiral of the Fleet who flew the union at the main; but this was with few exceptions an honorary, and not an active, post.

The governorship of Greenwich Hospital, which Rodney, now Sir George, held from 1765 to 1771, was such a comfortable post as might very properly be given to a naval officer who had served with credit. If family tradition is to be trusted, and it is doubtless substantially correct, Rodney was a good-natured Governor to the pensioners. The Hospital was at that time a hotbed of the dirtiest conceivable jobbery and thieving of the lowest

type of the eighteenth century. A few years after Sir George had left it, Captain Baillie, who had become Lieutenant-Governor in 1773, published an account of its condition which led to a famous scandal, and a famous trial. From Baillie's narrative and the evidence produced in support of it, and in his defence in Court, it was shown that the funds were habitually pilfered; that dependents of great political personages were foisted on an institution established for the benefit of seamen; that the pensioners were starved and neglected. In point of fact the sailors who did get in were looked upon as a technical excuse for drawing the funds of the hospital, which were then divided among a mob of placemen. To be named a minor official and authorised to deal with contractors was to be provided for for life. It seems to me superfluous to say that Rodney never so much as put out his little finger to amend this sort of thing. His own friend Sandwich was one of the worst sinners connected with it all. To expect that a gentleman who was in the way of meeting Sandwich frequently at dinner, was on his side in politics, and looked to an alliance with him as a means of obtaining promotion, was going to hurt his own prospects and disturb the comforts of social intercourse merely because the office he happened to hold—partly, too, by the goodwill of this same Sandwich—was reeking with corruption, precisely as every other office was, would have been foolish indeed. Rodney would, no doubt, have allowed that it was all very contemptible; but then, so were so many other things, and as public business could not be carried on without jobbery, this piece of jobbery must be taken in with the rest. What, however, he could

do was to be good-natured to the individual pensioner; and this, it seems, he was. On the general principle that the least possible proportion of the funds of the Hospital should be devoted to the purpose for which they were originally assigned, it had been the rule that greatcoats should only be given to the men as a special favour. The Governor had power to grant this indulgence. Rodney was much too good-natured a man to refuse a favour—which cost him nothing—to a poor old sailor, and accordingly greatcoats soon became the rule, and not the exception, in Greenwich. The story also says that there was a naval Bumble, by the name of Boys, at the Hospital, who was outraged by this lavish treatment of paupers. He was Rodney's Lieutenant-Governor, and himself a naval officer. At the weekly Board he expressed his surprise at his superior's extravagance. An anonymous writer in the *Naval Chronicle* speaks of the look which the Admiral was wont to put on when things were sprung on him. We can imagine it—a mixture of surprise, indignation, and contempt, all kept in order by the instinctive self-control of an English gentleman. Boys had the benefit of it now as he heard Sir George Rodney's answer, which is reported as follows:—

I have the greatest respect for you as a man who, by the greatest merit, has raised himself from the station of a foremast man to the rank of an admiral—a circumstance which not only does you the highest honour, but would have led me to have expected you as an advocate instead of an opposer to such a necessary indulgence. Many of the poor men at the door have been your shipmates, and once your companions. Never hurt a brother sailor. And let me warn you against two things more: the first is in future not to interfere

between me and my duty as Governor; and the second is, not to object to these brave men having greatcoats whilst you are so fond of one as to wear it by the side of as good a fire as you are sitting by at present. There are very few young sailors that come to London without paying Greenwich Hospital a visit, and it shall be the rule of my conduct as far as my authority extends to render the old men's lives so comfortable that the younger shall say when he goes away, "Who would not be a sailor to live as happy as a Prince in his old age?"

The form of this rebuke may owe something to the reporter, but Rodney was just the man to have said the substance. To do a good-natured thing, repel an intrusion on his authority, and remind an officer who had come in through the hawse-hole of the respect he owed his social superiors, while fully acknowledging his merit, was quite in the Admiral's way. For the rest, Boys richly deserved his snubbing. Rodney also showed a wholesome dislike to useless dirt. He first established the practice of clearing away from the shore in front of the Hospital the garbage thrown up by the river. The administrative garbage he left alone, and perhaps it was as well for us that he did. If he had meddled with it he would certainly have come in contact with Sandwich, and the result of that collision would have been that he would have been left on shore throughout the American War, as both Duncan and Campbell were. They were the friends of Keppel, and therefore the enemies of Sandwich, and therefore also were left unemployed—at a time when England had need of every man—though known to be among the best officers in the service.

In 1768 Rodney stood, and was elected, for Northampton. The same arts that gained a power, must

maintain it. It was necessary for him to keep that position in the House which had hitherto been so useful. But times had changed. He could no longer be "chosen member for Okehampton" by Newcastle, whose day was over—who indeed died in this very year. The King had set himself resolutely to fight the Whig oligarchy with its own weapons, and was doing it with success. Rodney took his place with the King's friends, and did it this time at his own expense. The fight for Northampton was very severe, which, given the time and place, means that it was very costly. It gave Rodney his seat in the House, but it hung a load of debt round his neck from which he did not shake himself free for years. Nor was electioneering the only "method of evacuation" to which he had recourse, and perhaps it was not even the most effectual. He lived in the great and "fast" society of his time, which may safely be taken to be only another way of saying that he gambled. Between the one form of extravagance and the other he certainly impoverished himself.

In 1771 he was appointed to a command, and again sailed to the West Indies. The dispute about the Falkland Islands seemed likely in that time to lead to another war with Spain. If it had done so, the West Indian command would in all probability have made good the damage done to Rodney's fortune by his seven years on shore. Money was now very important to him, and as has been already said, he made a claim to be allowed to retain his governorship while in command at sea. With the help of the double salary he might have been able to free himself from his liabilities. But the request was refused, and he sailed for his station, which was on this

occasion Jamaica, and not the Leeward Islands. Here again disappointment awaited him. The quarrel with Spain blew over, and there was no war. In the early days of his command Rodney caused His Majesty's ministers some considerable anxiety. Just after his arrival on the station there had arisen one of those periodical squabbles with the Spanish guardacostas which had been the fertile cause of quarrels and bloodshed in the West Indies. An English tender which was found "prowling with hostile keel," as Mr. Bright would have said, too close to the Spanish main, was arrested by the Spanish cruisers. It doubtless appeared ominous to the officers of the Catholic king, who must have been perfectly well aware of the nature of the relations of the two countries at the time, that an armed English ship should have been just there just then. Rodney took a high tone, protested fiercely, and sent a line-of-battle-ship to look into Carracas. Technically he was in the right, but his superiors at home were far from pleased at his promptitude. There was no wish in England—not at least among those who were responsible for the government of the country—for a war with Spain. When, therefore, it was known that war-ships had been sent on a mission of remonstrance, and almost of menace, into a Spanish port, ministers who knew what a trick the cannon had of "going off by themselves" in the West Indies were greatly displeased. The Ministry suspected their Admiral of an intention to bring on a quarrel if he could. Rodney was sharply rebuked for sending a subordinate officer to a place where a little want of tact and temper might so easily produce a collision. Sandwich even took very strong measures. In a letter which is a

model of official reprimand he told Rodney quite plainly that if he thought a war in the West Indies would do him any good he was greatly mistaken. If war should unfortunately break out, said the Minister, it would be necessary to send out strong reinforcements, and in that case a superior officer would be sent in command. Rodney could be trusted to know what that meant. It was manifestly calculated that he had no wish to repeat his experience in 1762. How far the suspicions of the Ministry were founded no one can say. Probably they were not altogether baseless. No doubt Rodney, like other Englishmen in the West Indies, did long to give the Spaniards a lesson. Sandwich, measuring the corn of others by his own bushel, may have thought that an officer whom he must have known to be embarrassed in his affairs would risk much for the chance of a stroke at a Spanish port or the capture of a treasure-ship. Here, again, he was certainly not altogether wrong. Rodney's need of, and desire for, place and money in those years was great, and was quite frankly avowed. He was, however, far too capable a man not to know that too much may be risked even for the greatest prize. To fall into disgrace at headquarters would be ruin. When therefore he distinctly understood what the Ministry wanted he conformed precisely to their wishes, and was soon rewarded by being told that the King was pleased with him.

The remainder of Rodney's three years of command, then as now the fixed term of a commission, were passed in routine work. He showed his natural hatred of slovenly inefficiency by stamping out one scandalous little piece of jobbery. It had become the custom in

Jamaica to water the fleet by contract. There was no real need to do so. Good water had been obtained in the immediate neighbourhood of Port Royal by Vernon, and could be obtained again. Nothing more was needed to make it accessible than the construction of a small aqueduct to bring the water down to the beach. Under the pretence that it could only be obtained good in the high ground, a system had arisen of buying it from contractors, who sent it down to the beach in barrels. There it was taken by the ships' boats. The system was thoroughly bad. It was costly; it imposed a great deal of hard beach work on the seamen, which was bad for their health in the tropics; it caused a great waste of time, the water supplied was inferior, and the length of time during which they were on shore afforded the sailors too many opportunities to get drunk. The one advantage the practice had was that it allowed of many mutually advantageous pecuniary transactions between the government officials and the contractors. On this pleasant commerce Rodney ruthlessly put his foot. In vain was it represented to him that nobody knew where Admiral Vernon had watered, that the spring had disappeared, that, in short, there were a dozen excellent reasons why the water must be brought down in barrels. The Admiral was not to be fooled. He hunted the spring up, and found that only a narrow slip of marshy ground separated it from the beach. After a tussle with red tape, he contrived to get a small aqueduct constructed, and so set up a rational watering-place. He was rewarded, as too many reformers have been, by the ingratitude of those for whom he worked. The sailors ended by hating the aqueduct. At first, indeed, they

blessed the Admiral, who had relieved them from the toil of rolling barrels down the beach and shipping them. But soon they discovered that if there was no more beach work there were no more opportunities of "sucking the monkey," which, as Swinburn explained to Mr. Peter Simple, was the name given to the practice of sucking rum from cocoa-nuts. Then they d——d the Admiral in chorus. To that, however, Rodney was supremely indifferent. His aqueduct was made with notable results, both in economy of money and for the health of the men of the squadron. This story is more to Rodney's credit than some others we have come across. If the watering contracts had been necessary for electioneering purposes he would doubtless have tolerated them as he did other corruptions—because Parliamentary government could not be carried on without them—and in that case the end would have justified the means. But where there was no such excuse, then Rodney could put himself to some trouble for the good of the service. This is what distinguishes him from meaner men. They would have lazily tolerated the old muddle, or have shared the gains of robbery. Rodney was not a man of that stamp. When he did attain command he knew what things worked for efficiency, and would insist on having them done.

As his commission drew towards its end Rodney saw the approach of the time when he must return to England—to face his duns on half-pay. It was a disagreeable change, which he would fain have avoided. Nor was it difficult to fix on a method of escape. If he could have passed from the command of the station to the governorship of Jamaica he would be fairly well

extricated from this ugly pass. Sir W. Trelawney, the Governor in office when Rodney went out, was in ill health. The Admiral decided to offer himself as candidate for the vacancy, which everybody foresaw would soon be made by the West Indian climate. Some months before poor Trelawney's shoes were empty—in the summer of 1772, in fact—Rodney was already bestirring himself to secure the friendly offices of Sandwich. It was a cause of bitter anger to the Admiral that these efforts were made in vain. He had very good claims to the office, both on the ground of his services as a naval officer and his knowledge of the West Indies. He must have felt, too, that he had claims of a kind even more deserving to be recognised than any based on service and knowledge, namely, the votes he had given in Parliament and the money he had spent in elections. Sandwich politely ignored both kinds of claim. The tone of his answers to Rodney is that of a politician writing to a gentleman from whom he does not expect useful support in future. His letters are civil, but formless, with here and there a point of irony. He begins with a dry remark that Sir W. Trelawney is still alive, and, so far as ministers know, is likely to live; but, of course, if a vacancy should occur it would be most proper that Sir George should have it; and he, Sandwich, writing as a friend, would advise him to stir his, Sir George's, friends up to exert themselves. For the rest, Sandwich does not object to tell him in confidence that there is no rival in the field. Rodney knew his world too well to be in any doubt as to what that meant. Sandwich would give no effectual help. If he wanted the place for a partisan of his own he

would even oppose. The place was obviously wanted for somebody else, the partisan of Sandwich or of whomsoever else had the patronage. When Sir W. Trelawney died in 1773 he was succeeded by Sir Basil Keith. At the very close of this part of their correspondence Sandwich, to judge from a sentence in one of Rodney's own letters, seems to have hinted that if the Admiral really could not return to England he had better stay in Jamaica as a private person. The suggestion was certainly made, and if it did come from Sandwich it more than trenched on impertinence. Rodney refused to stay on any such footing in a society which had seen him in a great command. When his three years were up he returned to England, and struck his flag at Portsmouth in September, 1774.

He returned to England an embittered and disappointed man, believing and saying that he had been treated with gross ingratitude. It is of course easy to say that this was absurd, that Rodney had held a succession of good commands, and that if he had embarrassed himself by gambling and electioneering, this want of judgment on his part did not entitle him to more places. To this, if it had been said in the society to which he belonged, Rodney might very properly have replied by asking the speaker either to cease his impertinence or clear his mind of cant. As between himself and Sandwich these embarrassments did constitute a claim. It was an understood thing that when a gentleman had spent his money for the right interest at elections he was entitled to compensation for it in the form of office or pensions. If he did not obtain recognition it was not because of any regard for the public service on the part of ministers,

but because they felt they could drop him with impunity. At the close of his second West Indian command Rodney had, for the time, fallen into the class of those who can be dropped. He was too much indebted to be useful as a candidate for a borough which must be fought. Men of smaller claims could be found for pocket boroughs. His old political friends were all very sorry but really——! To be dropped as useless can be pleasant to no man, and therefore it is not wonderful that Rodney was savage, and cursed the ingratitude of politicians. For the moment, however, there was nothing for it but to beat a retreat. At the close of 1774, or very early in the following year, he did what many half-pay naval and military gentlemen have been compelled to do since—he betook himself to the Continent to economise, and set up his quarters in Paris.

It is of course needless to say that whatever he did in the capital of France he did not economise. A gentleman who has preserved profuse habits to the age of fifty-six, which Rodney had now attained, may indeed (total abstinence being easier to men of passionate temperaments than moderation) take up with the good old gentlemanly vice of avarice, but he will not economise. As he did not become avaricious, the Admiral naturally went on wasting money. By 1778 he had, without as it would seem shaking off his English claims, contracted French debts to a considerable amount. With these last is connected one of the most famous of all the stories told about him. By this year France and England were notoriously going to war. The House of Bourbon in France and Spain saw in the revolt of the American Plantations an opportunity to

revenge the humiliations of the Seven Years' War. Help was given underhand to the rebels. American naval adventurers were received in French ports. Some of them even found their way to Paris, where they swaggered in a fashion which, so he told Lady Rodney, convinced the Admiral they must be cowards. Finally came open war, the despatch of D'Estaing's squadron to the coast of America and the West Indies, and the formation of the great French fleet at Brest. All this Rodney had to watch with longing. He went much into the best society in Paris (which helps to account for the fresh debt), and must have seen the growth of the hopes of the Court that at last the time was come in which the "proud islanders" were to be repaid for Quebec, Quiberon, Lagos, and much more. One story—one wild legend which can hardly have even a basis of fact—tells how Rodney was actually offered the command of the French fleet if he would betray his country. A more acceptable tale records his answer to a question from the Duc de Chartres, known to infamy as Philippe Égalité, as to what would happen if he, the Duke, met the English at sea off Brest—"That Your Highness will have an opportunity of learning English." It was well to speak up with spirit for his country, but it would have been better to be in a position to fight for her. This, however, was what Rodney, tied to Paris by his debts, could not do. His creditors became clamorous. Thanks to the "protection of the Lieutenant of Police," they were not allowed to proceed to extremities. A gentleman was a gentleman in France at that time, and was treated with consideration. If he was a foreigner there was all the more reason why he should be tenderly treated. His

duns then were not allowed to imprison him, but they could not be prevented from dunning him, and until they were satisfied he could not leave Paris. Rodney applied for employment. A dry official acknowledgment of the application was the only answer. Lady Rodney returned to London, leaving the Admiral with his daughters in Paris, in the hope that friends might be induced to give help. It was all to no purpose. Rodney remained in Paris, and it seemed not impossible that he might be kept there by his debts all through the war—perhaps even be confined in prison as a debtor if ever the Lieutenant of Police were to withdraw his protection.

From this shameful disaster Rodney was saved by the magnanimity of old Maréchal Biron. The Maréchal had been much his friend, and in these days Rodney speaks in his letters to his wife of the old gentleman's hospitality to himself and his daughters. At last the Frenchman offered to lend him enough to pay his debts and cover the expenses of the journey to England. Rodney was unwilling to accept the generosity of a national enemy, even though he were a personal friend. It was not until the offer had been three times repeated, until all hope of help from England had proved vain, that he at last took the helping hand held out to him. In May, 1778, he took the loan, paid his debts, and immediately left for London, coming himself by Dieppe. The last few days in Paris, he writes, "will be occupied in visiting all those great families from whom I have received so many civilities, and whose attention in paying me daily and constant visits in a great measure kept my creditors from being so troublesome as they otherwise would have been." It was the best of the *Ancien*

Régime that it did at least know how to behave itself like a gentleman.

The exact amount received by Rodney from Biron was 1000 louis. This being a debt of honour was repaid at once by the help of the Drummonds, the bankers. The children, who begin now to be constantly mentioned in his letters, returned under the charge of a servant by way of Calais, and the Admiral was at last able to push his claims at Court himself.

CHAPTER VI

THE RELIEF OF GIBRALTAR

RODNEY was now sixty. In the June of this year 1778 he attained the rank of Admiral of the White Squadron. He had for some time been Rear-Admiral of England, an honorary rank, to which however a salary was attached. The Vice and Rear-Admirals of England were, and indeed are—for the titles are still to be seen in the navy lists—supposed to be second and third in command to the Lord High Admiral when there is one. In rank, therefore, he was at the head of his profession, but his reputation was still to make. The forty years or so of service which he had accomplished had gained him distinction, but not more than had been won by several of his contemporaries. When the American War broke out, Keppel, Byron, Barrington, and Howe were as well known as himself. Keppel at least was far more popular. It was the work of the next three years which secured him his unique position in his own generation. What has been recorded hitherto must be looked upon as introduction. What is coming is the real work of his life. Up till now his career has been divided by commissions and periods of years. The rest will be told in campaigns and days of battle.

It is therefore interesting to be able to see what kind of man he was, now when his great career was about to begin. His own deeds and letters have told something, and will tell more, as to his character, but one must go to his contemporaries for what he looked like, and what the world thought of him. Sir N. Wraxall took care to leave some knowledge on both points duly recorded in his reminiscences. Wraxall is no doubt a writer whom it is advisable to use with caution. Not being of opinion that it is worse to tell lies about Whigs than about other people, nor even convinced that every discreditable story told about a member of that virtuous party must needs be a lie, I do not know that the *Mendacium Wraxallianum* deserves particular condemnation. Still the book is largely composed of an old man's reminiscences of other men's tittle-tattle. Such an authority is only to be used safely by those who can distinguish and divide. When, for instance, Wraxall, under the attractive head of "Rodney's Amours," tells us that scandal associated the Admiral's name with the frail reputation of very "exalted females," we need not take his words as more than what they really are—evidence of what people said. This again is evidence of what was thought sufficiently credible to be worth repeating in that world and at that time. Society then did not think it manifest nonsense to whisper that this naval officer was the father of one of the limited number of royal bastards who are of royal blood on the mother's side. Supposing the story true, it only proves what is otherwise abundantly known, namely, that Rodney—living as he did when not at sea in the pleasure-loving society of London, at a time when it did those things

which it always has done, perhaps more, and certainly more openly than it has done since—was not morally either better or worse than most men of the world.

For the rest, these days lay far behind Rodney in 1778. The heat of his youth had been tamed by age and pain and disappointment. His affection was now given to those to whom it belonged of right—to his second wife, and to his children by both his marriages. There is a reference to the death of his second son by his first marriage, in the shipwreck of the *Ferret*, in one of his letters to Lady Rodney, which has a very genuine ring of grief. His eldest son, now an officer in the Guards, seems to have lived much apart, as was only natural, but from Lady Rodney's letters it appears that he was on friendly terms with her and with his half-brother and sisters. This half-brother went to sea with the father, and was treated with the best of all forms of kindness—that namely which insisted on making a man of him, and refused him promotion till he knew his business. Lady Rodney herself had her husband's affection and entire confidence. His letters to her put that beyond dispute. Collingwood himself, the most tender-hearted of men, did not write of and to his daughters more lovingly than Rodney. Their names occur constantly in his correspondence, and thoughts for them, their good, and their future, were never absent from his mind. The natural instinct, and sometimes the cant, of the moralist lead him at times to assert that these domestic virtues in later years are in themselves disproof of the truth of such stories as are told of Rodney's earlier life. When that is not an affectation it is a very innocent belief. Whether it is better or

worse for a man to go through the "mud bath" may be doubtful. What is certain is that many men do go through it and live to be clean. In 1778 the passion which remained strongest in Rodney was ambition.

Wraxall's picture of the Admiral's appearance and manner may be accepted without any interpretation. He says that he was slight with delicate features. In that Wraxall is borne out by Sir Joshua Reynolds's fine portrait. The features are refined rather than strong, and are small. Having been taken when the Admiral was old, the face is that of a man who has suffered much pain. We do not need Wraxall to tell us that the Admiral's manners were those of a gentleman and not of a tarpaulin. Given his birth and training, what else should they be? Again it is very credible that the Admiral was a copious talker, vehement in the expression of his likes and dislikes, not at all averse to talk about himself, nor even to boast. The sailor has always, perhaps to console himself for much compulsory silence at sea, been open to reproaches touching his loquacity on shore. Moreover, he is by tradition hearty, given to speaking out his mind, not so conscious as other Englishmen of the decency of reticence—whereby if he is a good friend he is also liable to make enemies. Rodney made many enemies, and the tone of his letters bears out Wraxall's assertion that it was by the vigour with which he condemned what he thought worthy of condemnation.

Rodney's age at the time of taking his great command is a fact to be kept in mind. His years had necessarily some effect on his energy. The state of his health, too, is not to be forgotten. He was older than his years.

The sea life, always a wearing one, was particularly hard in those times. No man could have inhabited such a floating pest-house as the *Dublin* without suffering for it. Besides, gout had made its home with Rodney long before this. He was liable to be laid up by it at any moment, and was so well aware of the danger that he took a doctor to sea with him to attend upon himself exclusively. It is no small drawback to the efficiency of a commander that he should be for ever compelled to struggle with an infirmity. There are no want of examples to prove that the misfortune is one which can be conquered. Rodney's contemporary, Maurice of Saxony, beat or manœuvred the allies out of the Low Countries though he was a cripple with the same disease. Still, ill-health was a terrible addition to the difficulties of an otherwise trying position. Age and infirmity must be allowed for in his case, either for excuse or for honour. It will be necessary sometimes to remember that if he had been younger and stronger he might have done more, or that if he had not been old and sickly it would have been less honourable for him to have done as much as he did. His gout, too, had inevitably much influence on his relations to his officers. To say nothing of the notorious effect of this disease on the temper even of less nervous and passionate men than Rodney, it compelled him to seclude himself a great deal, and so intensified his natural disposition to hold himself aloof from his captains. His relations with his subordinates were rarely friendly, and this had, as it could not but have, effects which were not for the good of the service. One thing more must be noted, namely, the extent of his pecuniary embarrassments.

This was at the time public property. All men knew, and Rodney himself never affected to deny, that command was necessary to him for the money's sake. It will be seen that this impecuniosity was one of the excuses found for attacks on him at a later period. For the present it will be enough to remember that there was the need, and there was the general knowledge that it existed.

Throughout the second half of 1778 and the greater part of 1779 Rodney was established in London at lodgings in Cleveland Street, straining every nerve to secure a command. He pressed his claims and his views on the Ministry. His desire was to get back to the West Indies, which, as the enemy never made any but half-hearted attacks on us in the Channel, was destined to be the great scene of the war. Those seas were well known to him, and in a series of able papers he explained to Sandwich how, in his opinion, we could best conduct operations there so as not only to defend the islands, but to give the utmost possible help to the King's forces on the northern continent. Later on, and after Rodney's first successes, the minister hastened to claim credit for having listened to his arguments and secured his appointment. Rodney himself asserted emphatically that he owed his command to the King alone. It was to the King certainly that he applied. For a time he had necessarily to wait. All the great commands were filled when he returned from Paris. Neither his rank nor his wish allowed him to serve as a subordinate. He was therefore compelled to look on as a spectator at the first year and a half of the war. During that period events were working for him. The general course of

operations was not of a nature to raise the reputation of other men to his detriment. On the North American coast, indeed, Howe beat off the superior force of D'Estaing stoutly and by dint of wary manœuvring. In the West Indies Barrington seized and held Santa Lucia—a position of immense value, as Rodney well knew—in the teeth of a far stronger French force. The whole subsequent course of the war was influenced in our favour by this timely capture. Still these successes were not of a kind to impose the victorious commander on the Ministry as a necessary man.

In the Channel the course of the war had removed a whole batch of formidable rivals from Rodney's path. Keppel's feeble action with D'Orvilliers off Ushant in July, 1778, was a bitter disappointment to the nation. It was followed by a series of quarrels and courts-martial more discreditable and more injurious to the country than a defeat could well have been. The Tory admiral, Sir George Palliser, was egged on by Sandwich to discredit the Whig admiral, Keppel. There followed court-martial and counter court-martial. The mob of London took sides for Keppel, sacked the houses of Palliser and Alexander Hood, and burned the gates of the Admiralty in Whitehall. The navy went by the ears in a Whig and Tory quarrel. In the mind of the King and minister there arose a determination to employ no more Whigs if it could be helped. When the excesses to which faction carried men in that time are remembered, the resolution can be fairly justified. Mean things were done by the Ministry, no doubt. It was scandalous, for instance, that Duncan—he who afterwards conquered at Camperdown—should have been left

on shore throughout the war, as punishment for the resolution he showed in securing fair play for his friend Keppel in the court-martial. Still, when it is remembered that the Whigs as a party were openly opposed to the coercion of the American colonists, and that they seldom scrupled to help the enemies of their country if their "connection" could profit thereby, it is only natural that the King should prefer not to employ them. If the work was to be done at all, it had better not be put in the hands of men who were half-hearted in the doing. Now, as this party had had the whole distribution of patronage for the greater part of the century, it follows, as the night the day, that the very great majority of admirals were Whigs. When to be a Whig became not an advantage but a disadvantage to the officer who was seeking command, great was the improvement in the position, and unaffected was the joy, of the admirals who were Tories.

Rodney was a Tory. At what period reflection and experience of public affairs brought him to these opinions I do not know. He can hardly have been a Tory when he was writing the letters quoted above to Newcastle. Probably he went to the side to which his instincts took him as soon as he saw that England had a king who meant to be king. For himself the conversion, if there was any conversion, was wholly for his good. I do not speak of his fortunes, but of his character. In future when he is found expressing devotion to a master it is not to a party manager, but to him to whom it was due of right—to his Sovereign. For his fortunes, too, his creed was advantageous. It must have been a real pleasure to George the Third to find an admiral who so thor-

oughly agreed with himself as to the proper view to be taken of the American insurgents. There was no doubt about Rodney's opinions. They were rebels, piratical rebels, who were to be hunted down and crushed. Through 1778 and 1779 his mobile face and eager eloquence must have been familiar at levees and drawing-rooms, as he explained with vehement eloquence that it ought to be done, how it was to be done, and who ought to do it.

In the autumn of 1779 the right officer was chosen. Rodney was appointed to the command in the West Indies to replace Byron. He was to have the supreme command in the Leeward Islands and Jamaica, with freedom to intervene on the American coast. On his way a preliminary piece of service was to be done. Since the beginning of the war Gibraltar had been besieged by land and sea. The many claims upon us, and above all the necessity of standing on our guard in the Channel against an attack by the immense fleet formed by the combination of the French under M. d'Orvilliers and the Spaniards under Don Luis de Cordova, had compelled us to leave our outposts in the Straits, and our other outpost at Minorca, to their own resources. The cruise of the combined fleets had done us little harm, owing partly to the diseases which devastated their ships' companies, and partly to those qualities of the Spaniard which have at all times made him the most exasperating of all mankind in a co-operation. The allies separated with mutual reproaches, and we were left free to strike a counter-blow. A great convoy was collected in the Channel. Twenty-one line-of-battle ships were to protect it. Of this force Rodney was to have the

command. His duties were to proceed to Gibraltar, relieve the fortress, send a convoy up the Mediterranean to Minorca, then go on himself to the West Indies with four ships, leaving his second in command, Rear-Admiral Digby, to bring back the empty transports, the sick and wounded from the garrisons.

From October till the end of the year Rodney was at Portsmouth with his flag flying in the *Sandwich*, a ninety-gun ship, driving on the preparation of the fleet and the convoy. His hands were abundantly full. The dockyards as usual required incessant spurring and whipping up. An immense correspondence had to be attended to, legitimate and illegitimate. The official work was bad enough, and it was aggravated by appeals from all sorts and conditions of persons, from the anxious mother down to the First Lord of the Admiralty imploring him to take care of Dowb—to find places, promotion, and favourable attention for their sons and nephews, and the deserving offspring of important constituents. Rodney was driven wild by it all, and wrote almost passionately to his wife, instructing her to inform at least one most pertinacious acquaintance that Admiral of the White, Sir George Brydges Rodney, was *not* a schoolmaster, and would *not* stand in *loco parentis* to an indefinite number of hopeful small boys. Then the wind joined in the dance. When at last transports and war-ships were ready, and collected at the back of the Isle of Wight, the westerly gales settled down to it, and blew right up Channel, whirling rain and mist along, wrapping up headland and landmark in an impenetrable cloak of salt haze. To take a heavy convoy of clumsy sailing ships in the teeth of that wind,

between the overlapping headlands which shut in the Channel, surpassed the resources of seamanship. There was nothing for it but to wait till it pleased the wind to blow from another point of the compass. In the meantime the Admiral had to pace the quarter-deck of the *Sandwich*, or sit in her cabin, receiving and answering pathetic appeals from the First Lord imploring him to get to sea, for God's sake to get to sea, and save not only Gibraltar, but his old friend, who will be driven rabid by questions in Parliament, and reproaches in places "to which he pays more attention," from the King, to wit, if something is not done and that quickly. During these days the dockyards, the officers of the war-ships, and the masters of the transports were kept on the stretch by a rattling fire of orders and rebukes. The Admiral's doctor also, Gilbert Blane, had his hands full, no doubt. This gentleman, for the rest, deserves more than passing notice, for he will be a conspicuous figure during the great years of Rodney's life. He is, in the first place, one of the best of our authorities, and then he has an honourable place of his own in the history of the navy. With Rodney's help and encouragement he did more than any man, except Cook, to drive the scurvy out of the fleet, and in so doing contributed very materially to the final victories by providing the admirals with healthy crews. It is to be noted that the circumstances of this struggle to be off in 1779 were so closely repeated when Rodney was going to sea on his last great cruise at the end of 1781, that some of his letters of the later date have been printed under the earlier in his published correspondence.

In the last days of December, 1779, the wind first fell and then shifted round to the east. With its help the

great fleet got under way, and at last swept clear of the Channel. An immense feeling of relief must have come to Rodney when at last he saw the Land's End sink below the horizon, and he knew that his priceless charge was clear of those narrow waters which, even in these days of steam, lighthouses, and fog-horns, the seaman navigates with that wise fear which is the mother of safety. His convoy consisted all told of over three hundred sail, and must have covered miles of sea from wing to wing. In the centre were the transports and merchant vessels. On either side of these sailed the line-of-battle ships. Ahead, and on the outlook for dangers, went the frigates, except a few told off to come behind the flock and bark at laggards. The wind continued fair and the great armament cleared Ushant, crossed the bay, and had passed Cape Finisterre, when the first of two well-deserved pieces of luck fell in the way of our fleet. The same change of wind which had released Rodney from the Channel had opened the way for a Spanish convoy from Ferrol. It consisted of sixteen vessels laden partly with merchandise and naval stores, partly with provisions destined for the Spanish force besieging Gibraltar. A sixty-four-gun ship, the *Guipuzcoano*, and six frigates or corvettes had been told off to protect it. Whether it was that luck or their own incorrigibly lazy habits were against them, the Spaniards were just too late in getting round Finisterre. As they turned to go south the English dropped right upon them at daybreak on January 9th, 1780. A general chase was at once ordered. A Spanish ship chased was a Spanish ship caught, according to a French naval officer of the time, and in a few hours every one of them was in possession

of an English prize crew. "Help from Spain comes late or never," was a proverb in the days when the tercios in the Low Countries, or in Tunis, looked in vain for help from the procrastinating government of Philip the Second. It has proved true ever since. On this occasion the succour came never to the Spaniards in the camp at San Roque. The provision ships were carried on to Gibraltar for the use of Elliot and his garrison. The bale goods and naval stores went to England under charge of the *America* and the *Pearl*. In order that they might be the safer from recapture Rodney manned the *Guipuzcoano*, renamed her the *Prince William*, and sent her also to convoy to England what had been meant for the help of England's enemies. The name was taken in honour of Prince William, afterwards King William the Fourth, who was serving in the fleet as a midshipman on Admiral Digby's flag-ship.

A week later a greater capture fell into his hands. On the 16th the convoy turned Cape St. Vincent, and at one o'clock was at a distance of about four leagues to the south of it. Rodney knew that the Spaniards had a squadron at sea to intercept reliefs for the besieged fortress. He was prepared for them, and had his warships now in front. At one the *Bedford* signalled that the enemy was visible in the south-east, ahead of the English between them and Gibraltar. At once the order was given to form in line abreast (side by side in land language), and approach the enemy. The wind was from the west or north-west, all in our favour now, and it rested with us to force the battle on. It was also our policy to force an action on, as we were in overwhelming superiority of force. The squadron now in front of

Rodney consisted of eleven line-of-battle ships, one of eighty and ten of seventy guns, and two frigates. It was absurd to suppose that such a force could offer resistance to twenty-one line-of-battle ships containing three three-deckers. The Spaniards were commanded by Don Juan de Langara. With the extraordinary fatuity which has distinguished the modern Spanish admiral and general, he had—so he seems to have actually said himself—taken it for granted that the English would do the most imbecile thing possible in the circumstances. He knew that a convoy was on its way to Gibraltar, and he must have known how important it was for us that the garrison should be relieved. Yet he made his mind up that the convoy would not be protected by war-ships. In this belief he waited quietly below Cape St. Vincent till the English convoy was good enough to run into his jaws. He kept no frigates to windward; he did nothing but lie there and wait. When Rodney bore down on him he allowed an enemy of crushing superiority to come close upon him, while he wasted invaluable time in forming "a line of battle on the starboard tack," with the intention apparently of going off in seemly order, instead of doing the only thing he could do at once, namely, put his ships' heads on Cadiz, and fly under every stitch of canvas he could set without carrying his masts away. So much mismanagement had, could have, and deserved to have, but one end.

At four o'clock Rodney, seeing that he need not stand on ceremony with an enemy half his size, hauled down the signal for the line abreast, and hoisted that for a general chase. There was no time to lose, for in that latitude the twilight is short, and in that season of

the year darkness was not far off at four o'clock in the afternoon. It was advisable to get to handgrips before it came on. The English ships were therefore ordered to go into action as fast as they could, and to take the lee-gauge. With the wind at west this would be on the eastern side of the Spaniard. This was for two reasons the best position. It would put the English between the enemy and his port of refuge at Cadiz, which lay to south of east of him; and it had this advantage, which at all conditions belonged to the lee-gauge, that if any of the Spaniards were crippled in the spars they would be driven by the wind among the English ships. But in the circumstances the course was a dangerous one, for it would necessarily bring the English close to the shore in the dark. The wind was rising, and there was every prospect of a stormy night. It was not without some hesitation, and after consultation with his flag-captain, Young, that Rodney finally decided to run the risk. Decide he did, however, and very shortly after four the quickest of the English ships were up with the slowest of the Spaniards, who were now—all futile attempts to keep order having been given up—flying for Cadiz "like a shoal of frightened porpoises a swarm of sharks pursue." Ranging up on the eastern side of them, the leading English ships opened a fire which was answered with spirit, but, to judge from the very trifling loss in our fleet, with exceedingly bad aim. Our vessels did not loiter by the Spaniards they had caught up, but pressed on to those ahead, sure that the English behind would answer for the lagging enemy. The order to the sailing-master of the *Sandwich* was, that no attention was to be paid to small enemies; she was to be

steered for the biggest—for the admiral if he could be discovered.

The action had not lasted half an hour when one of the Spaniards, the *San Domingo*, of seventy guns, blew up. One mangled survivor was picked out of the water, but died before his English captors could carry him to Gibraltar. At six another of the Spaniards struck. The wind rose steadily, and the night came, but not the darkness. There was a brilliant moon, and by its light the English could follow the Spaniards, who struck one after another. By two in the morning the *Sandwich* was alongside of the leading Spanish ship, the *Monarca*. After a few broadsides she too struck. Then, knowing that the enemy was practically annihilated, and knowing, too, that the headlong pursuit had brought the dangerous shoals of San Lucar under his lee, Rodney signalled the order to stop pursuit, and lie to for the night. By this time the wind had risen to a gale. For the remainder of the night our squadron was hard at work. It had to keep off shore itself, and to secure its prizes by shifting the Spanish officers, and part at least of the men, which, in the midst of the storm and the darkness which came on at last, were not easy tasks. Thanks to the difficulties thrown on us by the wind and the want of light, two of the Spaniards slipped through our fingers after we had taken possession. One ran on shore with her prize crew, and became a total wreck. Another was retaken by the Spanish prisoners who remained on board, and was by them carried into Cadiz. Four of the liners and the two frigates got away before they could be compelled to strike. The *San Domingo*, as has been already said, had been blown up. There remained in Rodney's pos-

session four line-of-battle ships, including Don Juan de Langara's own vessel the *Fenix*, with the Don himself on board grievously wounded. The day following the battle was spent in laboriously working off shore. Several of our liners, the *Sandwich* among them, had got into shoal water in the battle and the darkness, and were in great danger, in Rodney's own opinion. But the seamanship of officers and men was equal to the danger, and before night the war-ships were out of shoal water, and had rejoined the transports of the convoy, which had been kept out to sea.

The relief of Gibraltar had now been practically effected. The Spanish squadron had been swept out of the way, and no other was ready to replace it. The road therefore was open, but the winds and currents of the Straits presented difficulties of their own, and it was some days before the convoy got in—nor did it get in all at once. When the storm had blown itself out the wind fell, and the fleet was carried by the currents into the Mediterranean as far as Marbella. From thence Rodney wrote to Logie, the English Consul at Tangiers, to buy up cattle from the Moors to be carried over to the garrison, and sent word to Elliot of the victory. In Gibraltar however it was already known. A midshipman who was prize-master of one of the Spaniards taken from the Carracas convoy had brought his vessel into Gibraltar on the 17th. He had passed the fleets after the engagement began, and had actually seen the explosion of the *San Domingo*. Then Rodney himself had been seen from the look-out on the Rock by the help of the flashes of lightning during the gale, before he was swept out of sight again to Cape Spartel. With their knowledge of

the strength of the Spanish squadron, and what they learnt from the prize-master of the force under Rodney's command, the garrison could have no fear as to the result. They waited in confidence for the plenty which was to replace their recent short commons. It soon came pouring in. First Admiral Digby arrived with the wounded Spanish admiral in his captured flag-ship, and part of the convoy. A few days later Rodney followed. He had sent his second in command on before, because he had pilots for the Straits with him and there were none on the flag. A few days later he came in himself from Tetuan.

He remained at Gibraltar till February 13th, when he sailed for the West Indies. In the interval there was much to be done. The part of the convoy destined for Minorca had to be sent on its way, and Rodney had to wait till the ships protecting it returned. Then in Gibraltar the squadron had to be looked after, preparations made for the next voyage, and a ticklish negotiation carried on with the Spaniards as to exchange of prisoners. It was all successfully done. Minorca was relieved, and the ships returned. After much correspondence, conducted with infinite courtly politeness between Rodney and Langara, the exchange of prisoners was at least partially arranged, and at last the English fleet got off. Two days later it divided at sea—Admiral Digby to return to the Channel with the bulk of the force and the homeward-bound convoy—Rodney to make his way with four ships to the West Indies.

The events of this month of January had completely altered Rodney's position. When it began he was a distinguished officer like many others. When it ended

he was the first man in his profession, and the most popular man in England. The capture of the two convoys, the taking of an enemy's admiral and four of his line-of-battle ships, and the relief of Gibraltar, were by far the most brilliant events of the war so far as it had yet gone. It was true that we had had the odds in our favour; but then after nearly two years of depressing dulness the country had begun to suspect that even when numbers were in their favour its admirals had not spirit to make use of them. The suspicion was unjust, and no doubt either Howe or Barrington would have done the work equally well. As for Byron, "Foul Weather Jack," his ill luck was really so persistent that if he had been there the wind would probably have blown a gale from the east till he gave up attempting to get through the Gut altogether. But though others might have done the work, as a matter of fact it was Rodney who did do it, and he reaped the credit as a matter of course. Besides, although the odds were in our favour, the circumstances had been of a nature to somewhat redress the balance. The fiery pursuit of the Spanish fleet in the night and the gale, and on to a lee shore, had about it something of the "Quiberon touch"—a flavour of the old daring and seamanship. Here was a man of the old Blake and Hawke stamp—one who would not come back with a tale of a lee shore as an excuse for letting the enemy off.

With the King and the minister too the success had done Rodney infinite good. He had established a claim to their gratitude. That this timely piece of service should have been done by their Tory admiral was a

great point in their favour. There was something they could throw in the teeth of Keppel as he sat surrounded by the Whig connection in the House, snarling at the officers who succeeded him in the Channel command, and predicting disaster. From this time Sandwich's letters become not only most cordial but at times almost submissive. He is quite eager that the Admiral should tell people that he, Sandwich, had the credit of making so good a selection of an officer to command. From that one may judge how pleased the King was. George the Third had chosen Rodney at least as much as the minister, and he assuredly believed in the justice of the war in which he was engaged. That his admiral should have scored a victory in his war was a most legitimate source of joy to the King. For King, minister, and people alike the substantial results of the cruise were undeniably admirable. The relief of Gibraltar had shown that if the Spaniards were to get back the Rock it would not be by starvation. If they were to get it by other weapons there would need to be a great change in their methods of attack. The garrison was indeed much less effectually relieved than the nation supposed; but the failure was the fault not of the Admiral, but of the Ministry, which had organised the convoy very ill.

CHAPTER VII

THE WEST INDIES

AFTER touching at Barbadoes on his way, Rodney reached Santa Lucia on March 28th, and fought his first battle in those waters on April 17th. A variety of causes—some political, some physical—made the West Indies the great scene of naval fighting in the American War. France had been induced to help the insurgent colonists, partly from a desire for revenge, partly in the hope that she would be able to compensate herself for the losses imposed at the Peace of Fontainebleau by the conquest of the Lesser Antilles. Spain again had, not without reluctance, for it ill suited her to encourage the rebellion of colonists in America, been induced to join the alliance in the hope of recovering Jamaica and Florida, as well as of driving the English garrisons from Gibraltar and Minorca. Our possessions in the West Indies were therefore naturally an object of attack. The most effectual method of extorting both her Mediterranean outposts and her West Indian Islands would have been to attack England vigorously at home. As the allies were able to collect a fleet of over sixty sail at the mouth of the Channel in 1779, some such attack might, it would seem, have been made. The only force

we could then oppose to them was about thirty line-of-battle. They had, in fact, what Napoleon longed for—the command of the Channel, and that not for twenty-four hours but for weeks; yet the capture of a stray sixty-four was all they could effect.

Why France, which has so often threatened to invade us before and since, made no attempt to do so when the enterprise had been feasible, and even easy, is a curious question. The failure of their purely naval operations is easily explained. The Spaniards, who formed nearly half the great fleet, were wretchedly inefficient; short of provisions, as ignorant of the navigation of the English Channel as they had been when Medina Sidonia blundered into it and out of it, they were, moreover, miserably sickly. They communicated the plague to their French friends, who lost four thousand men by it. Apart, however, from this particular reason for failure, there was a permanent one which weighed on our enemy. France possessed at that time no port of war on the Channel. Brest looks on to the ocean. As the prevailing winds of the Channel are from west and south-west, it behoved a fleet in the old sailing days to beware how it trusted itself inside of Portland Bill; for if it were crippled either by storm or battle it might not be able to get out. In that case there would be nothing for it but to follow the fatal route of the Armada—to steer for home round the north of Scotland and to the west of Ireland. The sea, as M. Michelet pathetically observes, hates France. It has worn her coast flat and provided England with two noble harbours right over against her, at Portsmouth and Plymouth. Looking at these unfavourable conditions, the French, from La

Hogue downwards, have generally kept their fleets out of the Channel. Not being able to attack our heart, they have attacked our extremities. In the American War the particular extremity they selected was the West Indies.

To understand a general's fighting it is necessary to get some idea of his field of battle. The lay historian commonly remembers this well enough when he is dealing with battles on shore, but whether because he does not understand them, or discourteously thinks his reader cannot, he takes no account of the conditions in sea-fights; yet they are every whit as important and as intelligible. What the hill, the river, and the wood were to Napoleon or Wellington, the wind, the current, and the lie of the land were to Rodney or Nelson. They were obstacles to be avoided or advantages to be used. Rodney's field of battle lay in the Lesser Antilles, the long string of small islands stretching over six degrees of latitude from south to north which form the eastern division of the West Indies. The Antilles, great and less, are a vast broken reef which shuts in the gigantic lagoon called the Caribbean Sea. The eastern division, which reaches north to the Virgin Islands, has been broken small by the pressure of the ocean. From the Virgin Islands the reef turns sharp west, and its fragments become few and large—first Porto Rico is big, then San Domingo is bigger, then Cuba is the biggest. South of Cuba and in the Caribbean Sea is Jamaica. In 1780 Cuba and Porto Rico belonged to Spain, as they still do. She shared San Domingo with France, and longed to recover Jamaica from the hands of England. The Lesser Antilles were divided among England,

France, and Holland. To them considerations, physical and political, limited the area of the war.

All through the year, except in the immediate neighbourhood of the land or when the hurricane is raging over them, the Antilles are swept by the easterly trade wind. According to the season of the year, or the hour of the day, the trade blows from north or south of east, but it always blows from the ocean over the Lesser Antilles and along the Greater. Narrow strips of water are shut out from it by mountains, and conflicting temperatures cause an alternation of sea breezes by day and land breezes by night in the neighbourhood of the larger islands. But the trade is the "true breeze," the steady uniform force which in the days of sailing ships gave the law to war and to commerce. It even affected language, for in the West Indies men did not say east and west, but windward and leeward. The unceasing pressure of the wind on the water has established a surface current which flows to the west. Wind and wave together have worn the windward or easterly side of the Lesser Antilles bare. All the harbours are on the leeward or western side, looking into the Caribbean Sea. Thus wind and current alike tend to force all ships navigating the Antilles to the westward. When this pressure from the east is taken off it is by a force which suspends all his labours, whether of peace or war, and sends man crouching into the first place of safety he can find. From the end of July to the end of September are the hurricane months. While they last no sailing fleets cared to keep the sea. They lay in harbour or went elsewhere.

These physical conditions made the Lesser Antilles

the gates of the West Indies. Whoever held them could run down whenever he chose on the Western Islands, but ships coming from the west must work up into the wind by weary tacking, or by hugging the coasts of the islands to avail themselves of every varying puff of land and sea breeze, of every reset of the currents from the headlands. Whoever was to windward had the option of attack and the choice of his course. After a little reading of the accounts of old sea-fights, one can realise how appropriate is the use of the words "up" and "down" as applied to the leeward or windward position. He who was to leeward had literally to struggle up to his enemy as a man toils up a hill. He who was to windward could stand watching the foe till some such disorder in his line as is very likely to occur among a number of ships manœuvring together, or some fault in the course taken, gave him an opportunity to rush down and charge home. Then, too, the road to and from Europe lay through the Lesser Antilles. The heartbreaking shallows, reefs, and keys of the Bahamas make the approach to the West Indies from the north dangerous now; and in the eighteenth century, when surveys and lighthouses were not, they formed an almost impassable barrier. Therefore the conquest of the Lesser Antilles was looked upon as the necessary preliminary to an attack on the Greater, and so before the French would risk an attack on Jamaica, they must first drive us out of the positions of advantage to windward.

When Rodney reached Santa Lucia in March the adversaries in the coming duel were fairly equal in force and advantage of position. M. de Guichen had arrived at Martinique a few days before with reinforcements,

which gave the French a slight numerical superiority. As the possession of the islands was divided there was no marked advantage on either side. The French held Guadaloupe and Martinique, which had been restored to them at the close of the former war. They had lately captured Dominica, which lies between the two. They had also snapped up Grenada far away to the south, under the very nose of Admiral Byron. On the other hand Barrington had seized Santa Lucia and had held it in defiance of D'Estaing. This was a satisfactory offset to the loss of Dominica and Grenada. Santa Lucia lies to the south of Martinique, and a little to windward of it. At the north-west end it possesses the admirable harbour of Gros Islet Bay. From this place the French naval headquarters at Fort Royal in Martinique could be easily watched. Santa Lucia was therefore a much better station for our ships than Antigua, far to the north, which they had hitherto used, or Barbadoes, which lies out in the ocean to the east. When Rodney and Guichen began their struggle they were, as duellists should be, on fairly equal terms as to ground and sun.

How far they were equally well supplied with weapons is a question not so easy to settle. In that respect Rodney ought, if our rather complacent belief in the natural superiority of the British navy is well grounded, to have had an overwhelming advantage. As a matter of fact, however, the superiority of our fleet was by no means what it became later on, and was to remain all through the next war. The French navy was at its best, and that best was very good. On all modern principles it should have been by far the better

of the two. It was much the more carefully organised and schooled. From just before the end of the Seven Years' War till the beginning of this, the French Government had worked very hard at its fleet, and with very creditable results. The material strength of its navy was considerable. When in alliance with the Spanish, the combined force exceeded our own in mere number of available ships and guns. The education of the French naval officers was very thorough. They themselves were, for the most part, *cadets de famille*, younger sons of noble houses—gentlemen, in short, with the traditional gallantry of their class. Many of them belonged to families which had served "on the ships of the King" from father to son since Louis XIV established the *gardes de la marine*. Chateaubriand, in his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, has left a striking picture of the class from which the French naval officers were mainly drawn, the provincial nobles, who had kept all the pride of birth, but had not been corrupted by the Court. Their names read like a roll of those who defended the bastions of the *langues* of France or Auvergnes at Rhodes or Valetta. Indeed, they are often the same, for the connection between the order of Malta and the French navy was close. Service in the caravans of "the Religion" counted as service in the King's ships. The nobles of Provence, who recruited the order largely, were numerous in the navy, and some of them served in both—the Bailli de Souffren, for instance, who was by far the ablest of the French officers who appeared in this war, was a Knight of St. John. So there is a ring of romance about their names which is somewhat lacking to our own sober Bowens, Cornishes, Thompsons,

and Barbers, all of which sound but flat alongside of Buor de la Charoulière, Le Gardeur de Tilly, Visdelou de Lisnouel, Carcaredec, Assas-Mondardier, or Tredern de Lengerec. Among these gallant gentlemen were some of the best officers who ever served any king. They had studied their profession hard, and had thought much more of the military part of it than English naval officers. It is a fact which the reader may think creditable or not, that the technical treatises, whether on seamanship or tactics, used by English officers were mostly translated from the French. The crews of the French ships were formed either of carefully drilled landsmen, or of the fishermen who were swept into the navy by the *inscription maritime*. At the beginning of the war they were very well drilled and efficient.

There were, however, several weak points in this force, one or two of them of a very fatal kind. The fact that the officers of the regular corps were all nobles had in some respects a bad effect. It limited their number for one thing, so that when the whole navy had in modern phrase to be mobilised, it was necessary to employ supplementary officers who did not belong to the *gardes de la marine* and were known as *officiers blues*. The France of the eighteenth century would not have been what it was if these intruders had not been regarded with a certain amount of contempt and jealousy by the nobles. This led to one kind of dispute. Then again there were jealousies in the privileged corps itself between the port of Toulon and the port of Brest, between the division of the Mediterranean and that of the ocean—or, to put it in other words, between the nobles of Provence and those of Normandy and Brittany. All

these men too were so conscious that they were nobles as to somewhat forget the fact that they were officers. They thought little of their rank as compared with their common nobility. They all messed together, they thee'd and thou'd one another in the friendly second person singular. This easy good-fellowship must have been socially more pleasant than the stern subordination of an English ship, on which the captain lived apart in solitary grandeur, and the midshipmen looked up with awe to the lieutenants. But of the two, ours was the better system for discipline. In the French navy the midshipman of sixteen quarterings made no scruple of giving his opinion to his brother noble the captain, and the lieutenant who was as good a gentleman as either differed from both. There was a great deal of discussion in their ships when in an English vessel an order would have been given and obeyed.

A defect of this kind could have been amended. It would not have been equally possible to make good the poverty of the maritime population of France. That weakness was fatal, and beyond remedy. By taking immense care to drill men in peace, and by sweeping the mass of its merchant sailors into its war-ships, the French Government was able to start with an excellently appointed fleet; but it had no reserve. As the war went on, and men fell by battle or disease, they could not be replaced. It is notorious that the French navy could never make good the loss of the four thousand well-trained men carried off by the plague during the cruise of the combined fleets in 1779. Thus there was a steady loss of efficiency in their ships which grew in proportion as the number of vessels in commission increased. It was

not possible to find good men to man them or trained officers to command them. To take a single instance. At the very close of the war, Sir John Jervis, then captain of the *Foudroyant*, eighty, took a French seventy-four, the *Pegase*, after a very feeble resistance. It was found that the French crew were mostly landsmen collected by hook and by crook, while she was so short of officers that an *enseigne de vaisseau*—a mate as we should have said then, a sub-lieutenant according to our present scale of ranks—a lad of nineteen, was the only officer on her first battery. And this was only an exceptionally bad example of what was going on all through the French navy. In the meantime the English navy, drawing its men from a vast maritime population, and entirely unlimited in its choice of officers, was steadily getting more efficient. Taken as usual somewhat unprepared at the beginning of the war, it gradually collected the flower of our seamen from merchant ships in all parts of the world. Its officers came to it in thousands, mostly from the middle class, and no consideration of birth stopped the promotion of competent men when they could be secured. Under the government of vigorous admirals the fleet was welded and trained into a ten times better force than it was when the first shot was fired. This was, however, but the natural result of the profound difference of kind which distinguished the navies. When the French King wished to have a powerful naval force, it grew because a resolute and intelligent administration built it laboriously up. A high-spirited and alert people supplied brave crews and gallant, ingenious gentlemen to command them. But the force had no native life of its own. It was

what the State made it and no more. The English navy was a living force fed by the vitality of the nation. It was ever ahead of its rulers, and never passively submissive to the impulse from them. The immense advance in organisation and tactics, in armament, in gunnery, and construction, which took place in this war, was the work of the admirals and captains themselves—thought out by them, urged by them on their official masters at Whitehall, frequently made effective by them at their own risk and with their own money. The virtue which redeemed the many faults of the Admiralty was that it did leave to its commanders elbow-room and power. Between two such forces, one the mere work of the artificer, the other the living plant, there could be no doubt where the victory would ultimately rest.

That it was not decided sooner was due to the principles on which the French chose, and we were content, to fight. Whoever has taken even a slight interest in our eighteenth-century wars must have been struck by the inconclusive character of much of the naval fighting. Except where there was an overwhelming superiority of force, as in Hawke's attack on L'Etenduère, and Rodney's action with Don Juan de Langara, battles were mere cannonades at a less or greater distance, followed by the separation of the fleets without loss to either. At Quiberon, where our superiority in numbers was not so great, the French were flying before the storm, and in no order, when Hawke pounced on them. In this same American war there took place a round score of battles of which as much might be said. Now this was not due to want of will or spirit, but to the fact that officers on both sides played the

game according to rules which made effective fighting impossible.

With the French it was a settled thing that battles must not be decisive. They fought in a half-hearted way, not because they wanted courage, for braver men than Chadeau de la Clocheterie or D'Albert de Rions, or a hundred others, never walked a quarter-deck; nor because they wanted skill in tactics, for more ingenious manœuvrers than Aché or Guichen, or even Grasse, never hoisted a flag; but because they had always something other in view than the fighting of a battle. It was taken for granted among them that they must "fulfil their mission." The phrase is incessantly turning up in their histories. What it meant was, that when an admiral was sent to take this island or relieve that town he must avoid getting his fleet crippled in a yard-arm to yard-arm fight. The Government habitually impressed on its admirals the necessity of keeping their fleets intact, and these officers very naturally so manœuvred as to avoid a really damaging action. Now this style of manœuvring, though it may be right in particular instances, is fatal as a general rule of strategy, because it overlooks the elementary fact that the most effectual of all ways of succeeding in an ultimate object is to smash the force which the enemy has collected to defeat you. Besides, it has this deadly moral consequence, that it induces a timid, passive state of mind, which leaves you at the mercy of the enterprising enemy who charges home.

The wish to charge home was strong with our men, and the effort incessant, but until Rodney showed the way on April 12th, 1782, it was never effectually done.

The explanation of this failure is to be found in the enduring and almost pathetic devotion of the old admirals to the "line of battle." When a ship carries her armament on her sides—in a broadside, that is to say—she must bring her side to bear on the enemy in order to use her guns. When several vessels so armed are acting together, they must follow one another in a line, otherwise they would be constantly liable to fire into friends. Therefore as early as the first Dutch war fleets were marshalled in a line, one ship following another, at a distance sufficient to allow room to manœuvre, and yet near enough to permit of mutual assistance. This is the line ahead or line of battle. But the object of all formations is to enable you to get most effectively at the enemy, to break him up, to throw the whole of your own force on part of his, or at least to be superior at the point of attack. To do that it is necessary to get right among his battalions or his ships. This had been well known to the admirals of the Commonwealth and of Charles the Second, and therefore their fighting was furious and effective. But from about the Revolution time till the very end of the American War it was forgotten. Men fell into the pedant frame of mind. As Molière's immortal doctors thought much of doing the proper professional things and little of the patient, the British admiral thought first and last of his line. To keep that intact, to engage van to van, centre to centre, rear to rear, to go at it hammer and tongs ship to ship, till his gunnery had shattered the enemy and thrown him into confusion, then to order a general chase and pick up the prizes—this was what the British admiral dreamt of when he dreamt of battles. It was a manly

vision, but it could only become a reality if the enemy was prepared to meet him half way—which the French, who did not want a smashing battle, would never do. So the history of our battles against equal forces for nearly a century was something like this:—The British admiral, who is longing to be at them, manœuvres for the advantage of the wind in order to force on a battle, and gets it. The French admiral, who wishes to keep his line of retreat open, accepts battle to leeward, so that he has only to put before the wind whenever he wants to be off. Under reduced sail he slips slowly along. The English line comes down at a more or less acute angle. Then when the van is within gunshot the helm is put down, and the English ships run along the enemy's line, cannonading and cannonaded. Of course this means that they take the fire of every ship they pass, and as the French fire high, they get cut up in the rigging. When it appears to the French admiral that the leading English ships are sufficiently crippled, he puts before the wind and runs down to leeward. Then the British admiral has to rearrange his line, and make another shot at his slippery enemy. So it goes on till dark comes, and the fleets separate without loss of a ship to either. Sometimes they cross on opposite tacks, and the rest is as before with unimportant variations. The British admiral boasts he has made the enemy run. The French admiral boasts he has crippled three or four English ships and repulsed the attack. Each is quite sure he has won the battle, whereas in fact there has been no battle at all, but only an artillery duel, which in all war by sea and land is apt to mean mere noise and waste of powder and shot.

About 1780, however, there were some both in France

and England to whom it had begun to be clear that with such strategy and tactics as this nothing effectual would ever be done. Among the French officers Souffren had become disgusted with the feeble principles adopted in his service, and was longing for an opportunity to show his countrymen a more excellent way. That Rodney had thought the subject out, and come to conclusions of his own, he was to show in the first month of his command in the Leeward Islands. But that subject of King George to whom the folly of the old way and the need of a better was most clear was not a seaman at all, but a Scotch gentleman, who is supposed to have been one of the originals of Monkbarns. The name of Clerk of Eldin, the father of Sir Walter Scott's friend, must needs be mentioned in a life of Rodney. A considerable controversy has raged over the question, whether he influenced the Admiral, and if so to what extent. Like most controversy, it has owed not a little of its vitality to a lax use of terms, and of its rancour to professional vanity. To this day naval officers hear the name of Clerk of Eldin with a certain irritation. It is an exasperation to them that a landsman should have the credit of discovering what remained hidden for so long to so many famous admirals. Yet that he did see what they had not seen is certain. His family had crossed his boyish longing to go to sea, and he consoled himself by making the sea his hobby. He made short voyages from Leith. He sailed toy fleets on his pond at Eldin. He carried little models of ships—wild ducks is the proper name of them—in his pocket, and manœuvred them on the mahogany whenever host or guest would allow him to mount his

hobby. Like a true Scotchman, he could not be satisfied without worrying out the principles. At last it became clear to him that, until our admirals gave up running along the enemy's line, and took to smashing into it, there would be no end of battles such as Pocock had fought in the East Indies and Keppel fought off Ushant. He collected the result of his inquiries and reflections in one of the most luminous books ever written. It was so clear, indeed, that Adam Smith, with a respect for the human intelligence somewhat startling in a philosopher, hesitated to accept it all because it seemed to him so self-evidently true that he thought the admirals must have seen it all long ago unless there had been something against it which was obvious to their professional knowledge. Their blindness was, however, due to other causes—to such causes as prevented men of business from seeing those economic truths which were thought out by Adam Smith himself. In 1780 this book existed only in fragments printed for private circulation. These fragments were given by Clerk to a Mr. Aitkinson, a friend of Rodney's, in January of 1780, on a promise that they should be sent to the Admiral. Whether they ever reached him we do not know. There is no evidence that they did, and the evidence that they did not is purely negative. Clerk's name and the claims made for him will come up again. For the present, it is enough to cite him as an example of what was working in men's minds, and also because one likes to do a little justice to an ingenious gentleman who got firm hold of a truth, and has been carped at as a mere amateur by some members of a profession which had forgotten that same truth, and needed to be retaught.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1780

At the end of March Rodney was at Gros Islet Bay in Santa Lucia with a fleet of twenty-one sail of line-of-battle ships. His adversary Guichen was at Fort Royal Bay in Martinique, some thirty miles off to the north, with a force of twenty-three line-of-battle ships and two fifty-gun ships—a class of vessels which held an intermediate position between the liner and the frigate. Both admirals had their attendant swarm of small craft. In spite of the superior numbers of the French, the fleets were substantially equal. The French Government usually built its vessels bigger and better than ours, and the calibre of its guns was heavier. On the other hand Rodney had more three-deckers and seventy-fours than his opponent. What advantage there was—and there was some—was in favour of Guichen, but it was only just sufficient to enhance the glory of beating him. The superiority or even the equality of the Frenchman was somewhat of a surprise to Rodney, who expected to find himself in greater force. He complained that he had not been kept well informed by his Government of the movements of Guichen, who had sailed from Europe shortly after he himself left for the

relief of Gibraltar, and had got to the West Indies first. There was doubtless some ground for the complaint, but Rodney, who was just then rather disposed to find fault, made the most of it. The position was certainly not one which an admiral who believed in himself, as Rodney did, and commanded an English fleet, need have considered unfavourable.

Whatever ground of complaint he might feel he had, Rodney was resolved that there should be no shilly-shallying. On March 21st he turned into Gros Islet Bay with the four ships he brought from Europe and joined the seventeen already lying there under Sir Hyde Parker. One does not clearly understand why Guichen, who was already at sea with his twenty-three ships, allowed the junction to take place. He did, and then returned to Fort Royal Bay. After spending less than a week in watering his ships, and in settling matters of detail, Rodney got to sea on April 2nd, and paraded in defiance off the French harbour. It would have been utterly contrary to the usual practice of the French admirals if Guichen had come out for the mere purpose of fighting a battle. He would not stir till he had an "ulterior object," and so lay tight under the protection of the shore batteries. Finding that his enemy would not stir, Rodney returned to Gros Islet Bay, leaving look-out frigates on the watch. By April 15th the French had settled a plan. There was a convoy of merchant ships to be seen safe to San Domingo for one thing, and for another it was decided to make a stroke at one of the English islands. In this work Guichen had the zealous assistance of the then Governor of Martinique, the famous Bouillé, that

"quick, choleric, sharply discerning, stubbornly endeavouring man," who afterwards played so great a part in the Revolution. The plan was to ship a body of troops under Bouillé himself on board the war vessels, to stand northward with the merchant ships in convoy, to see them off for San Domingo, and then, by turning to windward between Martinique and Dominica, to beat up to Barbadoes in the hope of mastering it before Rodney could come up from Santa Lucia. Barbadoes was then full of French prisoners and prizes. The scheme was most characteristic of French naval operations at that time. It depended for success not on the previous beating of the English fleet, but on luck in avoiding a battle at sea. Of course if the English admiral behaved with common sense and energy he would catch the French up before they got to Barbadoes, and then they must fight or run. In either case there was an end of the scheme.

As a matter of fact it hardly even began to be put into execution. No sooner were the French known to be under way than the English look-out frigates were signalling the news to one another all along the thirty miles of sea between Fort Royal and Gros Islet Bay. As soon as the signal of the nearest frigate was seen by the look-out on Pigeon Island, a great mass of rock which shuts in the anchorage, the order was given to the English fleet to get up anchor. Without delay it stood out to sea, stretching to the north along the coast of Martinique in pursuit of the enemy. The French had slipped out by night, but Rodney judged that they would endeavour to make for Barbadoes through the Dominica Channel, and followed them hot foot. In the

course of the 16th M. de Guichen's fleet was seen by the English to the north, endeavouring to turn to windward between Dominica and Martinique about twenty-four miles to westward of the Pearl Rock. In order to secure the power to force on a battle, and also in order to bar the road to Barbadoes, Rodney worked to windward. Before night he had succeeded in obtaining that commanding position. It was too late to force on a battle, but during the darkness the English fleet kept across the road of the French, whose movements were keenly watched and immediately signalled by guns. The *Venus* and *Greyhound* frigates patrolled the space dividing the enemies till daybreak.

At sunrise, shortly after five o'clock, the two fleets were drawn up in two lines of from six to seven miles long, heading both to the north. The French were at a distance of some seven miles to westward and leeward of the English. At a quarter to six the signal was given to form the line of battle on the starboard tack at two cables' length. With the wind at east this would mean that the fleet was heading to the north. The cable as a measure of length being about two hundred yards, and the average length of a ship fifty-four, the line must have been something under six miles long. Before we go down with Rodney into the very inconclusive battle which was about to be fought, there are two facts which it will be necessary to note. The first is, that the system of signals then used in our fleet was most defective. There was no proper general code. Every admiral had to make his own on taking command of his squadron. It was not possible to do work requiring such minute finish of

detail as the formation of a code of signals in such circumstances. Much was apt to be omitted. In Rodney's own code, for instance, there was then no signal by which a captain could make known that he did not understand the admiral's orders. One was supplied after the battle. The second fact is this: at that time there existed a body of laws for the fleet known as the Fighting Orders and the Additional Fighting Instructions. These were not statements of the principles on which battles should be fought, but recipes for fighting a battle. They bear an almost comic resemblance to those cut-and-dried rules for painting a picture to be found in old drawing-books, which tell men that grief is expressed by pulling down the corners of the mouth, and pain by wrinkling the forehead. Moreover, they were worded with the looseness of an Act of Parliament. Such as they were, however, they were binding on all captains unless direct orders to the contrary were given by the admiral, who disregarded them at his peril, as had been shown in the case of Rodney's old chief, Mathews, who was broken by court-martial for an offence against them, though he only did it to get at the enemy and support the honour of the flag. With insufficient power to give orders, and hampered by a competing authority, a British admiral was very liable to find his fleet get out of hand. These same standing orders are responsible for much of the pedantry of our fighting during a century.

Rodney had decided to break away from the old tradition by which our admirals always endeavoured to fight van to van, centre to centre, and rear to rear. He had resolved to throw the whole of his ships on a part of the enemy. At a quarter to six he signalled that he meant

to attack the enemy's rear. The most northerly ships of his own line were under Rear-Admiral Rowley, one of the many of the name who have done much respectable sea-fighting. He himself was in the centre with his flag in the *Sandwich*. The rear, as the fleet was then sailing, was under the command of Sir Hyde Parker; the stern-most ship of all being the *Stirling Castle*, which was to be unenviably distinguished before the day was out. Until about nine o'clock no opportunity presented itself of making an attack, and the two fleets continued to stand to west of north watching one another—the French waiting for an attack, the English waiting for an opening. M. de Guichen had stretched his fleet well out, "as if," as Rodney scornfully put it, "he thought I was going to run away." At about nine Rodney saw a gap in the French line a few ships astern of the admiral, the leading English ship being then apparently about level with the leading Frenchman—and the last of the enemy, in the loose order they were in, a good bit behind the last Englishman. At once Rodney ordered the fleet to tack and steer for the enemy's rear—which, if the Frenchman had held on his course, would have thrown the whole of the English ships on the last eight or nine of his line. Guichen was too wary to be so caught. No sooner did he see the move of the English admiral than up went his signals, and the ships of his centre and van came round on their heel together and swept on to fill up the gap. Then the ships which had been nearly cut off spun round also. Resolute, as Wellington himself at Salamanca, not to strike till he could do it with effect, Rodney hauled his wind, and the two fleets resumed their attitude of observation, heading now to the south

with the wind on their port or left side, sailing nearly parallel with one another. So they continued for rather over an hour, the French, as before, too much extended, the English in a fairly compact line. At last Rodney decided to make an opportunity. Shortly after ten o'clock he reversed his order of march and went back again towards the north. Guichen perhaps thought the English admiral meant to avoid a battle, and was content to let him do so. He did not alter his own course, and now the two fleets ran past one another, the French to the south, the English to the north, with the wind on the beam. These opposite courses were continued for half an hour, when Rodney for the second time came round to the port tack, and headed to the south. The result of this movement had been to bring the whole of the English force opposite the rear third or half of the French. Again the two fleets stood on together to the south for another hour. The English fleet had been slightly disordered in the course of these movements; this or that vessel was out of her place, the rear had to be ordered to make more sail to close the centre. By midday all was in order and Rodney hoisted the signal to bear down all together, and each to engage the ship opposite her on the enemy's line.

The order was obeyed in a manner which threw Rodney into a paroxysm of rage. To him what ought to have been done was as clear as day. All his ships should have borne down together, so that the whole twenty-one would have come into action with a dozen or fifteen Frenchmen with every chance of crushing them before Guichen's van could turn to his assistance. By ship opposite he meant the ship opposite at

the moment, but what was self-evident to him was by no means so to his captains, nor to Parker, whose division was now leading. Brought up in the pedantic old school, and steeped in the orthodox faith that van should engage van, centre centre, and rear rear, they understood opposite ship to mean ship occupying the same relative position in the enemy's line. The order to attack the rear they supposed only to apply to the movement made at nine o'clock. So when Rodney and the ships astern of him which followed the movements of their admiral turned west to fall on the French rear, the ships ahead of him, utterly forgetting the order to keep at a distance of two cables' length from one another, and mindful only of the pedantic old theory, kept on along the French line, headed by the *Stirling Castle*, which went blindly on to put herself alongside the leading French ship miles off. Rodney's careful formation fell utterly to pieces, and his scientifically prepared plan of attack was ruined. His force, instead of being concentrated on a part of the enemy, was scattered all along his line. In vain were signals hoisted on the flag-ship. They were not understood by men whose minds were clouded by preconceived notions—were perhaps not seen in the smoke gathering from the cannon.

To Rodney it was now only left to do his own duty as a brave man. He placed his ship at about a pistol shot from the nearest Frenchman, and by furious cannonade drove him from the line. Even now he was exasperated by further bungling and by downright misconduct. The *Cornwall*, the ship immediately ahead, went too far from him. The *Yarmouth*, the next ahead of the *Cornwall*, did worse. She first stopped at too

great a distance from the French, and then actually drew out of action and lay to windward of the Admiral. This last piece of misconduct Rodney did amend. First a signal, and then when it was not obeyed a cannon shot fired into her, brought the *Yarmouth* down to the flag-ship's quarter. There by the voice of the signal lieutenant, who, standing by Rodney in the stern walk—the gallery outside the cabin—roared at her through his speaking-trumpet, she got the order to come into action again under the Admiral's stern. But the battle had gone to pieces. Nothing was left of it but a furious cannonade between the rear divisions of the two fleets. Fortunately the French made no use of the opportunity presented them by the confusion in the English line. Some of them were crippled, others misunderstood orders. By three o'clock many of them had fallen to leeward. M. de Guichen called off the ships engaged to form a new line. Rodney, seeing that nothing effectual could now be done, hauled down the signal for battle. The two fleets separated—the French standing to the north, the English to the south—and by night they were out of sight of one another. Even now the confusion in the English fleet did not end, for during the darkness some of the vessels were separated, and did not rejoin their admiral till late next day.

The bitterness of this disappointment remained with Rodney as long as he lived. He told Gilbert Blane that he was prouder of the plan he laid to beat Guichen than of the actual victory he won over Grasse two years later. On this latter occasion he owed something to fortune and much to the enemy's blunders. Grasse too was the inferior man. Had his orders been

obeyed on April 17th, Rodney felt that he would have won by pure good management, and against an adversary who was a master swordsman. This was the feeling of a genuine artist, and one cannot but sympathise with the anger he felt and expressed. Guichen even had a fellow-feeling for him, and wrote condoling with him on the bad support he had received. For himself, so he said, he thought eight of his ships were gone when he saw the beginning of the English attack. This letter, it is almost unnecessary to say, is not mentioned by French historians, but we have Rodney's word for it; and nothing could be more in keeping with the gallant, courtly manners of a time which retained the old faith that the noble cavaliers who follow the honourable profession of arms are not the less brothers and fellow-artists because they fight on opposite sides. Rodney indicated his feelings sufficiently clearly in his public letter—so clearly in fact that Sandwich thought it better to suppress a paragraph. Even as it was published there could be no doubt what the Admiral meant. He pointedly complimented Guichen on the support he had received from his captains, and abstained severely from any praise of his own subordinates. In private letters to Sandwich and to Lady Rodney he was vehement in wrath and denunciation, declaring in so many words that it was all a villainous plot to ruin him and discredit the Administration. Something must be allowed here for natural heat and something for gout. Rodney had already complained in bitter general terms of the conduct of some of his captains in the fight with Don Juan de Langara, when, if we are to judge by results, every man's duty was well done. We need not

suppose there was any villainy or plot, but only stupidity and routine. It is a fact which ought to be remembered that the conduct of Parker and the captains in the van was partly justified by the hidebound fighting orders. The fault of the failure rests more with the neglect to form a proper code of signals, and the foolish system which compelled an admiral to fight in chains imposed by standing orders.

His sense of their conduct was not unknown to his captains, and one of them actually complained to him and insisted on a court-martial. This was Carkett of the *Stirling Castle*, the officer who led the van right away from the centre. He drew upon himself an admirably worded and most severe rebuke. No court-martial on him was ever held. Poor Carkett perished in the dreadful hurricane which desolated the West Indies in the following October. He was one of the officers from before the mast, and had been the hero of a famous episode in the Seven Years' War. At that time he was first-lieutenant to Captain Gardiner in the *Monmouth*, sixty-four, in Admiral Osborne's squadron, which was blockading a French force in Carthagena. One of the Frenchmen was the *Formidable*, eighty, which had been the French flag-ship in the scandalous battle off Minorca. Now Gardiner had been Byng's flag-captain on that occasion, and he had sworn to attack the big Frenchman whenever he met him, if it were only in an open boat. The French squadron slipped to sea, were seen by the English, and scattered in flight. Gardiner picked out the *Formidable* and followed her. Both sailed well, and had soon run the other ships out of sight. Then the Frenchman, exasperated by the pursuit of an enemy

half his size, turned at bay. Gardiner was as good as his word. He attacked in a masterly manner and with indomitable pertinacity. Shortly after the action began he fell with a musket-shot in the head. The wound was swiftly mortal, but while he could still speak he charged Carkett to fight it out, to go down if he must with his colours flying, but never to leave the Frenchman, or to strike. Carkett kept his charge in the letter and the spirit. Metaphorically, or perhaps in heroic reality, he nailed his colours to the mast, and fought till the *Monmouth* was a hulk, and the *Formidable* was beaten to a standstill. At last two of the slower sailing ships of the English squadron, guided by the sound of the cannon, for the action had been carried on in the night, came up, and the French captain struck. He insisted, however, on surrendering his sword to Carkett; not to the senior captain of the two new-comers. It is impossible to believe that such a man wanted courage or loyalty. Indeed Rodney, even while rebuking him, fully recognised his bravery and the quality of his former service.

The case of Bateman of the *Yarmouth* was very different. He too had risen from before the mast, but with no such record as Carkett. In the action he had simply misbehaved, and it was not for the first time. The *Yarmouth* had been badly handled in Admiral Byron's action off Grenada. Bateman was court-martialed and dismissed the service at New York some months later. In his case Rodney was implacable, and even allowed his feelings to carry him into what the officers of the court-martial thought undue interference and protested against with spirit The Admiral had to

make something approaching an apology to the President of the Court, Sir Chaloner Ogle. With this and one other exception there were no courts-martial. Rodney knew that the Government was exceedingly anxious to avoid any repetition of the scandals which had followed the battle off Ushant. He did not himself wish to discredit the flag by publishing details of misconduct. For the rest, though his teeth were sharp, his bark was worse than his bite. In the course of these months he tells his wife a story which shows that he was not implacable. A certain Captain —— had angered him by allowing his ship to get into a bad condition. Rodney had resolved to suspend him, and had actually gone on board with some hostile intentions. It happened that the captain's wife and daughters were staying on board. Now the girls were such nice girls, and the mother was such an agreeable woman, and the whole family was so amiable, that the Admiral's heart bled at the thought of bringing misery upon them. The old Adam of gallantry was too much for him. Rather than bring tears into the eyes of those sweet girls he let the service go for once, and contented himself with sending the ship home in charge of a convoy. It was well for Captain —— that his wife was above rubies, and that he had such children to parley with the enemy at the gate. As a rule, indeed, Rodney's course was to get rid of captains whom he could not trust by sending them on convoy so soon as reinforcements from Europe enabled him to dispense with them.

The days immediately following the battle were spent in hard work. Although he had missed victory Rodney was not beaten, and determined to show the

Frenchmen as much. He therefore resolutely kept the sea, and barred their road to Fort Royal. The *Sandwich* was so battered that for twenty-four hours she was in danger of sinking. Rodney shifted his flag to the *Montague*. The damage was repaired at sea. As the French, who are driven to some straits to find victories at sea, have claimed April 17th as one, we may pardonably remind them that quiescence on the part of their admiral seems to show they were as badly mauled as we were. On the 20th, three days after the battle, the French reappeared to the north, but on finding the English waiting for them, made off at once. Guichen took his ships northward to the Dutch, and then neutral, island of St. Eustatius, where he was able to refit, which does not look like the conduct of an officer who felt conscious of superiority. After cruising for a few days longer in sight of Martinique, to the no small disturbance of the French colonists, Rodney, seeing that Guichen had retreated, went south himself to Santa Lucia, leaving frigates to watch Fort Royal. At Choque Bay he was able to get fresh water, to land his sick and wounded, and to complete his repairs.

On May 6th the look-out frigates reported that the French had reappeared; this time to the eastward of Martinique. Rodney at once put to sea with nineteen line-of-battle ships and two of fifty guns, turning to the windward of Santa Lucia by the north to meet the Frenchman. He had now an opportunity of doing what he told his wife greatly needed to be done—namely, of teaching his captains to be officers. "Every captain in this fleet," he once said to Gilbert Blane, "thinks himself fit to be Prime Minister of Great Britain." The

Admiral was resolved to show them that they should not disobey, or show a want of promptitude in obeying, the orders of George Brydges Rodney. He set resolutely to work to bring them to a proper degree of smartness. While he was manœuvring in front of Guichen the days were passed in tacking in succession or tacking together, in wearing in succession or together, in forming column and forming line. Whenever a ship was out of her station her signal was made, and she was publicly rebuked without regard to the seniority of her captain, or to the fact that she carried an admiral's flag. Rodney even threatened to hoist his flag in a frigate in order to observe the line from a distance the better. It is easy to understand that such schooling was disagreeable to old captains who thought themselves masters of their profession. Rodney's second in command, Sir Hyde Parker, a thorough seaman and solid fighter of the old stamp, was wrought by it into a state of sullen fury. When he returned to England a few months later he was with difficulty restrained by Sandwich from rushing into a pamphleteering attack on his late commander. For the present, however, there was nothing for it but obedience. At the end of a few days the lesson had been taught, and the English squadron manœuvred with the precision of Frederick's grenadiers. Rodney might have found a more excellent way. If he had had more of the kindly good-fellowship of Nelson, if he had been wont to talk things over and explain his ideas to his captains, to get the wild ducks out after dinner and work out problems, it might have been better for his glory. But this was not Rodney's way. He lived apart from his captains, whom he generally regarded as his

social inferiors—neither asking for their friendship nor giving them his—asking only for that implicit obedience which he was ready to render to his own official superiors. As a natural consequence he got obedience, but he won none of that loyal devotion which bound Collingwood, or Hallowell, or Hoste to Nelson. His relations to his subordinates were always strained. They knew that he expected them to act only on his order, therefore they would do just what they were ordered and nothing more. He could never shut up his signal-book as Nelson could, with the confidence that he had instilled his spirit into his captains and could trust them to act in it. On Rodney's part, however, it is only fair to remember that the relations of Nelson to his captains were exceptional, and would not have been possible unless he had been absolutely sure of their spirit of discipline. In the American War the bonds of discipline required to be tightened, and Rodney did well to tighten them. To say that he could not temper command by good-fellowship, that he could order but could not inspire, is to say that he had not the genial temperament of the very greatest stamp of leader, of a Nelson or of a Gustavus Adolphus, to whom, king as he was, all soldiers were brothers, who knew that his personal influence would give him all the superiority he wanted. To that race Rodney did not belong.

The second phrase, as the fencing men would say, of the duel with Guichen was pure manœuvring on both sides—mere doubling and disengaging. The Frenchman, who had the advantage of the wind when they met, took care not to lose it, and though he had a distinct superiority in number of ships, would not force on a

battle. According to the French historians it was the English admiral who avoided action. It does not seem to strike them as absurd that, if it were so, Guichen did not bear down, and either force him to stand, or chase him ignominiously into Santa Lucia, as on this supposition he could have done. The facts show that Guichen was by no means anxious for a close fight. He would come down in line of battle to just out of gun-shot, and there parade in defiance much as a mischievous boy might flaunt a red rag at a bull from the safe side of a fence; but so soon as the English seemed to be coming into striking distance the French worked up to windward at once. "They kept," said Rodney, "an awful distance." It was a somewhat risky game, for the fence was not quite permanent. Though the trade wind blows from the east it does not blow always from the same point of east, and a slight shift in it might enable Rodney to get to windward. Once it did give him the chance, but only for a moment. Then it dropped back and the Frenchman slipped off. During the fortnight in which the two fleets were zigzagging in front of one another, the Frenchman always breaking measure, to take to fencing language again, so soon as the English were within lunging distance, there were two partial actions, one on the 15th the other on May 19th. On one if not on both of these occasions the English fleet could have forced on a battle by steering into the rear of the French line, and so cutting off the last three or four ships. If this had been done Guichen must either have left his tail behind him like the lizard, or have fought a real battle. But Rodney was not prepared to break away from the old system of tactics as

yet. He could only use it with more tactical judgment than his contemporaries. These actions, therefore, presented no particular novelty, and were thoroughly feeble. At last the two fleets separated by mutual consent. Both were in fact in a very bad condition. The use of copper sheathing was only coming in among ourselves. The French had not begun to use it. Ships, being unprotected against barnacles and worms, grew rapidly foul and leaky. Some of Rodney's were in an almost sinking state, and Guichen's were not in better case. Finally, the admirals were glad enough to separate, and return to port on May 21st. Guichen steered for Fort Royal round the north end of Martinique, Rodney sent three ships into Santa Lucia, and then made his way with the bulk of his fleet to Barbadoes, in order to be on the spot if the French should persevere in their designs on that island.

Practically this was the end of the measuring of swords between Rodney and Guichen. There was no further fighting or attempts to fight among the Lesser Antilles that year. Hardly had Rodney reached Carlisle Bay in Barbadoes before he received news which materially altered the position. It was brought by Captain Mann of the *Cerberus*, who, while cruising off Cadiz early in the month, had sighted a large convoy under the protection of a squadron of line-of-battle ships steering to the west. He followed them in the hope of cutting off one of the merchant ships, and so learning more about them. The enemy was too vigilant, but he saw enough to convince him that this was a Spanish force on its way to the West Indies. Captain Mann used his discretion in the right way. He left his station and hurried with the

news to the Antilles. Soon other messages to the same effect arrived from Commodore Johnstone's squadron on the coast of Portugal. Rodney made all possible haste to sea and resumed his cruising to windward of Martinique. But the Spanish commander, Don Jose Solano, was a more capable man than Langara. He had foreseen the possibility that the English might be at sea on this station, and therefore steered farther to the north so as to enter by the Saints' Passage between Dominica and Guadaloupe. Then he anchored in Prince Rupert's Bay in Dominica, and there waited to be joined by Guichen. The meeting was effected, and the force of the enemy thereby raised to thirty-six line-of-battle ships. It was hopeless to attempt an attack on such a force, and Rodney made at once for Gros Islet Bay in Santa Lucia. He moored his fleet under the protection of batteries, and fortified Pigeon Island. The measure was destined to be the salvation of the station in the next year, but for the present its worth was not put to the test. The Spaniards were as usual much more a hindrance than a help to their allies. They had the plague on board, and were dying like sheep with the rot, or as they say themselves—say with less than their habitual felicity of expression—*como chinchas*, which, saving the reader's reverence, are bugs. This great force therefore did nothing. Don Jose was so cowed by the wretched state of his squadron that he insisted on being convoyed to San Domingo by Guichen. From thence he made the best of his way to Havannah. No wonder that French and English naval officers alike prayed that they might have the Spaniard as an enemy but never as a friend. As soon as he had seen his burdensome allies

well into the Bahama Channel, Guichen, who knew that his squadron was worn out and saw the hurricane months close on him, left the West Indies. After touching on the coast of the insurgent colonies he, to the bitter disappointment of the rebels, insisted on sailing for Europe. The West Indies were thus practically clear of enemies.

In the meantime Rodney had been waiting for the attack which never came. Early in July he was reinforced by a squadron from England under the command of Captain Walsingham, but it was now too late to do anything. The hurricane months were just beginning. A very rude rhyme has been formed to aid the mariner's memory, and it limits the hurricane season with reasonable accuracy—

June too soon,
July stand by,
August look out you must,
September remember,
October all over.

In this July Rodney decided to leave waters in which nothing could now be done. He sent the trading ships, which had collected for convoy, to Europe under charge of Sir Hyde Parker and those of his captains whom he desired might be better strangers to him in future. Rowley and Walsingham were ordered to Jamaica. The safety of the Lesser Antilles was provided for sufficiently, and then he sailed for Sandy Hook himself with ten line-of-battle ships and a frigate.

The campaign of 1780 had done nothing to diminish the reputation Rodney had gained by the relief of Gibraltar. He was not held responsible for the failure

to win on April 17th, or the subsequent failure to force Guichen into close action in May. Although what fighting there had been was but indecisive, the substantial results were considerable. All attacks on the English islands had been stopped, and although no effective counter-stroke had been delivered at the French, yet we had remained masters of the field of battle at the end in spite of the enemy's superior numbers. To be sure the sufferings of the Spaniards from the plague had helped us materially, but they were the consequences of a dirty inefficiency in our foes which would one day, when opportunity and faculty combined, give us a decisive victory. At home, therefore, Rodney's fame was great. He was being sung into immortality by ballad-mongers. His lady was highly complimented by the King in frequent Drawing-room. Other rewards of a more substantial kind were not wanting. When the thanks of the House were voted him for the relief of Gibraltar, his friends had, with more zeal than judgment, moved that the King should be petitioned to grant him a pension. With almost incredible want of taste they made much of the Admiral's notorious pecuniary embarrassments. The motion was opposed by North as irregular, and even indecent. It was certainly unnecessary. A pension with remainder to his children was granted, and would certainly in any case have been granted by the King.

CHAPTER IX

ST. EUSTATIUS

RODNEY'S decision to go to New York was not a hasty one. It was part of a scheme which had long matured in his mind. When he was applying for command during the summer and autumn of 1778 he had written several papers to Sandwich, giving his views of the principles on which the naval war should be conducted by us in the West Indies and on the coast of North America. They show a power of looking at warlike operations as a whole, and a sense of the vital importance of plan and aim which cause some doubt whether the Admiralty made the best use it could of his services when it appointed him to a command at sea. The capital defect of our management at that time was precisely the want of coherence in our operations which Rodney could have supplied. If instead of sending him to the West Indies the Government had given him the post which was to have been held by Collingwood, and was actually filled by Lord Keith in Napoleon's time—if it had named him commander-in-chief with his headquarters at Portsmouth, and had given him a general control over the movements of squadrons—we might have been the poorer for one great victory, but our navy

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RODNEY'S decision to go to New York was not a hasty one. It was part of a scheme which had long matured in his mind. When he was applying for command during the summer and autumn of 1778 he had written several papers to Sandwich, giving his views of the principles on which the naval war should be conducted by us in the West Indies and on the coast of North America. They show a power of looking at warlike operations as a whole, and a sense of the vital importance of plan and aim which cause some doubt whether the Admiralty made the best use it could of his services when it appointed him to a command at sea. The capital defect of our management at that time was precisely the want of coherence in our operations which Rodney could have supplied. If instead of sending him to the West Indies the Government had given him the post which was to have been held by Collingwood, and was actually filled by Lord Keith in Napoleon's time—if it had named him commander-in-chief with his headquarters at Portsmouth, and had given him a general control over the movements of squadrons—we might have been the poorer for one great victory, but our navy

Divided it could only stand at bay, or at best carry on a guerrillero warfare which might be, and was, brilliantly successful for a time, but was none the less doomed to be futile in the long run. Rodney could do nothing to remedy the defective management of the land forces. He had little chance to use his squadrons with effect. The departure of Guichen had made it impossible for the enemy to keep the sea. Their squadron which did remain on the coast kept close in Rhode Island Harbour, where it had the protection of powerful batteries and of an American force. Clinton declined to co-operate in an attack, alleging that the enemy's works were too strong, and that the time had gone by in which anything could be effected against them. He laid the blame of failure to act sooner on Arbuthnot, the admiral on the station. Arbuthnot attributed it to the sloth and stupidity of Clinton. There was a great deal to be said on both sides, for the soldier though brave, now and then active, and a "good drill," was a wooden personage; and the sailor, though no one ever questioned his courage, and he was doubtless able to manage a ship, was a quarrelsome, narrow-minded, selfish man. Rodney could do little except comment on the miserable management of the war and stimulate the activity of our cruisers against the Yankee privateers. He was moreover in ill health himself —compelled to remain much on shore at New York, complaining bitterly of the damp and cold of the climate. His presence in irresistible force on the coast served to depress the rebels, then at the lowest point of their fortune. Nothing, however, was done, or could be done, to really weaken the immense essential strength of the American position.

The sad truth is, that the chief outcome of his presence on the station was a violent quarrel with Arbuthnot. This officer, who was his inferior in rank, resented his arrival from the West Indies deeply. He thought it mean in a brother admiral to come and spoil the fun—to come, in plain words, and take the prize-money. A miserable interest of the pocket was at the bottom of this as of so many naval quarrels. To the good of the public service Arbuthnot seems never to have given a thought. All he cared to see was that the arrival of a senior officer on the station would deprive him of the commander-in-chief's share of every prize. Indeed he had very soon practical demonstration of this unpleasant truth. Shortly after Rodney's arrival one of the frigates which he had taken over from Arbuthnot captured a vessel laden with arms and stores for the rebels. The admiral's share of the prize-money was £3000, and that Rodney pocketed with punctuality and despatch, thereby driving Arbuthnot into an explosion of fury worthy of Hawser Trunnion. Rodney's own view is given by himself in a letter to Jackson the Secretary of the Admiralty. He points out that if he had looked to money only he might have made a lucrative cruise on the Spanish main, but "tho' the hand of adversity and the base ingratitude of individuals had learnt me the value of Riches, it has not, or ever shall, eradicate from my mind the Duty I owe my King and Country." He would not cruise for money only, but if in the fair way of duty he came where money was, he would take every sixpence to which he had a right. Arbuthnot was sulky and rude. He made difficulties and sent home complaints; but he had to deal with a

man who was resolute to be obeyed. "I find myself, my dear Sir," wrote Rodney again to Jackson, "a Butt for Envy and Mallice. I had rather have Envy than Pity. I will go on and endeavour by exerting myself in the Service of my King and Country to deserve more Envy and more Mallice. It cannot hurt me for I am resolved to do my Duty, and no Rank whatever shall screen any officer under me who does not do his Duty. The Good, the Worthy, the truly Brave officer will love and Honour me, others are unworthy my notice. All shall be treated like gentlemen, and none under my command shall ever have reason to tax me with Disrespect to them; but I will be the Admiral." This, as Sandwich might have said, was "the great line." Rodney was in the right, and was supported by ministers. If their support had gone to the length of superseding Arbuthnot it would have been the better for the public service in the following year.

A quarrel about money affords a convenient opportunity for reverting to Rodney's own financial position. It had been materially bettered at the expense of the enemies of his King and country. His letters to his wife during these months contain satisfactory references to the speed with which his prize-money was enabling him to clear off the worst of his debts and provide for his family. There was another purpose for which funds were greatly needed. When he sailed at the end of 1779 Rodney had told his wife that a naval officer who wished for proper support must have a seat in Parliament. So soon, therefore, as the first creditors were satisfied—none, let us hope, were paid sooner than the Drummonds—he forwarded funds to Sandwich for the

purchase of a seat. By the decision of his friend, apparently, he was put up for Westminster, and Sandwich was able to inform him in September that the funds having come to hand in time, "the free and independent" had duly returned him at the head of the poll. It is curious that he, a thorough-going supporter of the Administration and a "King's friend," stood with Fox, the bitterest of all the critics of Lord North's Cabinet, who was destined to be a member of the very Ministry which recalled Rodney himself from the West Indies in 1782 with contumely.

At the close of 1781 he sailed again for the West Indies, and arrived early in December after a stormy passage. During his absence the station had been swept by one of the most dreadful hurricanes on record. It burst on October 10th, when, according to sea lore, it ought to have been "all over." Not only was it late, but it was far-reaching. Barbadoes had been supposed to lie beyond the track of the hurricane, but this year it was terribly smitten. Plantations were desolated, and the very fortifications were blown down. The other islands were no more fortunate, and a whole squadron of war-ships was cast away or so shattered as to need a complete refit. The French islands suffered as severely as our own. The greatness of the disaster cowed both sides for a time into fellow-feeling. Spanish prisoners at Barbadoes exerted themselves "like friends" to help their captors, and were effusively thanked by the Governor. Bouillé, at Martinique, sent back some shipwrecked English seamen, declaring that he could not consider the victims of such a misfortune as prisoners of war.

This subdued mood could not last. Rodney was not likely to allow himself to be stopped by sentiment. In December he had his squadron in good trim again. He decided to see whether an effective stroke could not be delivered at the French. St. Vincent seemed to present an opportunity. The island was reported to have suffered seriously from the hurricane, and the fortifications were said to be entirely ruined. As the island lies directly to the south of Santa Lucia, and had been taken from us by the French early in the war, the temptation to attempt something on it was irresistible. A body of troops, under General Vaughan, was embarked on the squadron, and the combined force went south in good hope. But the expedition was a failure. The reports as to the damage done by the hurricane turned out to have been grossly exaggerated. The fortifications were found to be intact, and far too strong to be taken except by regular siege, for which Vaughan had neither men nor battering-train. After a few days' stay on shore the soldiers were re-embarked, and the squadron returned to Gros Islet Bay.

Its stay here was not long. Reinforcements were coming, and there was work of a tempting kind to be done. The reinforcements included the prizes Rodney himself had taken from the Spaniards. We had sheathed them in copper, and they were among the finest ships afloat. Samuel Hood, who has been named as having served under Rodney in the attack on Havre as captain of the *Vestal* twenty-two years earlier, and had just been promoted rear-admiral, was in command. He had been expressly chosen in the hope, which was not to be disappointed, that he would prove a capable second. Samuel Francis Drake, who was as yet only commodore, but was soon to be rear-

admiral, was third. Captain Edmund Affleck came next to them in seniority. The names of these three will be found conspicuous during the remainder of Rodney's fighting. Hood arrived in January, 1781, and in that month there came also orders to set about a piece of work which Rodney undertook in joy and hope, not foreseeing that it was destined to prove to him the source of infinite worry, of bitter attacks, of loss of credit, and of loss of lawsuits, which reduced him in his old age to the poverty which he had just shaken off.

Owing to a variety of causes which do not directly interest us, Holland had been drawn into the war. Orders, dated December 20th, came out to Rodney and to General Vaughan to seize the island of St. Eustatius, which, with St. Martin and Saba, belonged to the Dutch.

To quite understand all the enterprise was destined to mean to Rodney, it is necessary to take into account the position of St. Eustatius. This island, with its even less favoured sisters St. Martin and Saba, is little better than a mass of barren rock. It lies far up in the Lesser Antilles between Barbuda and Santa Cruz, just north-west of our own island of St. Christopher or St. Kitts. As it has little native wealth, the Dutch with their usual good business faculty made a free port of it, hoping that traders glad to be free from the severe colonial trade legislation of those days would use it as an open mart. They were not disappointed, and the island had always had a kind of prosperity as a place of exchange. The outbreak of the rebellion in the plantations gave an immense impulse to its industry. When direct trade with the insurgent plantations was stopped it was very soon found by both sides that this measure of hostility

had its inconveniences. If, for instance, Americans were not to be allowed to export cotton and tobacco to punish them for rebellion, Englishmen could only inflict the castigation by depriving themselves of tobacco and cotton. The West Indies were nearly touched by a cessation of trade, for the planters were in the habit of importing the maize and bacon on which they fed their slaves from the North American plantations. If they were deprived of these the slaves would starve; if the slaves starved the islands would be ruined; if the islands were ruined the loss to England would be enormous. Our fathers, though high-spirited, were practical men. Patriotic emotion and the unity of the Empire were good, but they must not, it was spontaneously felt, be made to mean the loss of cheap cotton, the second qualities of snuff, good pipe tobacco, and the sugar trade. A compromise had to be made between our principles and our necessities. It was found by granting permission for the importation of American produce through St. Eustatius. The inevitable result was to throw the whole trade between England or her West Indian Islands and the plantations into the market-place of St. Eustatius. The island sprang for a day into the prosperity of Tyre and Sidon. There the English merchant and the West Indian planter met the Yankee trader, and they dealt with one another. There, too, they met and traded with the men of the French islands with whom they could no longer directly deal. Vast rows of warehouses arose like mushrooms and were rented for immense sums. Alongside of this trade there arose another. Given the natural inclination of mankind to sell in the dearest market, it was inevitable that a

great business in contraband of war should be carried on in such a favoured spot. St. Eustatius became in fact what our own island of Nassau in the Bahamas was during the American Civil War—a depot for the articles classed under that name. Finally, it may be noted that great numbers of our own West Indian planters and merchants, particularly those of St. Kitts, endeavoured to secure their goods from the risk of capture by the French by storing them in a neutral island.

In fact the place was as useful to us as it could be to our enemies. But when war broke out with Holland it was decided to seize upon it as a matter of course. To Rodney no order could be more agreeable. He had long regarded St. Eustatius with particular hatred as the place from which our enemies drew most of their stores, and also as the place in which traitors to their King and country were base enough to trade with rebels. The opportunity for an attack was very good. The Spaniards were either lying at Havannah or wasting themselves in petty attacks on our garrisons in Florida. Only four French line-of-battle ships were at Fort Royal. On January 30th Rodney, having shipped a force of soldiers under General Vaughan, sailed from Gros Islet Bay. After passing in front of Fort Royal, he left Drake with six ships to watch the Frenchman and steered directly for St. Eustatius. The place was surrounded on February 3rd, summoned, and taken at once. The Dutch governor, Graaf, having no soldiers and no forts, could only surrender at discretion. Rodney, who had had a sharp passage of arms with him before concerning a salute fired to the Yankee flag, had a particular joy in receiving his submission, and, it must

be acknowledged, treated the poor man in a very high and mighty manner. The disasters of the Dutch did not end here. A convoy of one hundred and thirty sail had left a few days before under the protection of a ship of sixty guns. It was followed by two seventy-fours and a frigate, which easily seized it all after a very brief action in which the Dutch admiral, Krull, was killed, fighting at hopeless odds for the honour of the flag.

So far all seemed well. The booty taken was estimated at the magnificent figure of three millions sterling. Rodney announced that everything taken should be at the King's mercy. The news was sent home at once, and received with much huzzaing and throwing up of caps. A great blow had been struck at the low-minded Dutch, and the people rejoiced therefore. Lady Rodney and Sandwich hastened to tell the Admiral how delighted everybody was with him. The King resigned all his rights to the officers of his sea and land service. A great cry of rage and disappointment went up from the French islands and the rebellious colonies, which was meat and drink to Rodney. For some time his letters are literally overpowering with triumph over the splendid blow he had struck at the enemies of his country and the traitors who dealt with them. But the somewhat of bitter which is proverbially seldom absent from human joys was soon found to be mixed with this cup also. In the fire of his zeal Rodney had been neither to bind nor to hold. He had confiscated immense quantities of property belonging to British subjects—to the planters of St. Kitts in particular. He had forgotten that the King could neither take nor give away more than his right. The letter in which George the Third

resigned all his own claims contained a clause specially exempting the property of his subjects engaged in legitimate trade from seizure. It would have been well for Rodney's happiness if he had paused to think what those words meant. It would have been well too for his reputation if he had remembered how careful it behoved a man, whose friends had paraded his poverty in the House of Commons, to be before he laid hands on money. He thought of nobody and nothing except the joy of trouncing enemies and traitors, and the happiness of at last getting prize-money enough to wipe all debt off, and leave something for his dear children.

In this frame of mind he remained for some time. When the planters of St. Kitts sent their attorney-general to state their case, he refused, rash man, to discuss the matter with a lawyer. The profession was amply avenged, for Rodney had to listen to many lawyers in the Admiralty Court, of which he appears to have totally forgotten the existence until reminded by writs. The Jews, who abounded in the island, were stripped to the skin and sent packing. The Dutch had surrendered at discretion, and were treated after the manner of Alaric. To the French, who were open enemies, Rodney showed more consideration. They were allowed to go with bag and baggage. Bouillé, who was furious, wrote angry letters, and he and Rodney, as Burke put it, defied one another in the highest style of chivalry. In this respect, however, Rodney's conduct was, in diplomatic phrase, perfectly correct, and he stuck stoutly to his guns. Correct also was his conduct in respect to the naval stores, in spite of the charges brought against him later on. He sent them

all to the King's arsenals. As for the other goods, with the exception of a very small part which was returned to English owners, they were sold *sub hasta*. The island, in the words of the *Annual Register*, "became one of the greatest auctions that ever was opened in the universe." All comers, except the late owners, were permitted to bid, and the goods were knocked down to the highest bidder —often, such was the glut in the market, at a third or quarter of their price. The buyers were permitted to take them away subject to a few restrictions imposed to prevent the transport of provisions to the French islands. The money was stored partly in the flag-ship, partly in the island, which was to be fortified, and provided with a garrison. What goods could not be sold, or were likely to prove more profitable in England, were laden on a great convoy, which was to have sailed under the command of Affleck, and did actually sail under Hotham. At this work Rodney remained till the beginning of May.

It is impossible, I am afraid, to acquit the Admiral of great want of judgment, and, what is worse, of inability to resist the temptation to look after his own pocket too eagerly, in the whole course of this transaction. His folly in taking upon himself to decide what was and what was not lawful prize was of course glaring. It carried its own punishment. Every man who knew he had a case brought an action against him in the Admiralty Court. One after another they went against him, and he was compelled to refund. What made this the more disastrous for him was, that the great convoy from which he hoped for so much fell into the hands of La Motte Picquet, who was cruising at the mouth of the

Channel, and was almost wholly carried into Brest. The island of St. Eustatius was retaken by Bouillé, and immense booty lost there. Rodney had therefore to satisfy the claims of the suitors out of the remnants of his prizes and his other means. The drain left him a poor man to the end of his days. His family biographer, who has given a narrative of these events marked by judicious suppressions, complains that the Admiral was deserted by his official superiors. Some English merchants whom Rodney sent home as prisoners to be tried for unlawful dealings with the rebels were, it seems, released at once in England, and their books, alleged to be full of criminating evidence, were quietly returned by Lord George Germaine, the Secretary of State. But Rodney ought to have remembered that in any case it would rest with ministers to decide whether the accused men were to be tried for treason or not, and that it was mad in him to act as if they had been actually tried and condemned. I am afraid that zeal for the public service cannot be successfully pleaded in his defence. This could have been provided for by keeping the goods under lock and key till they were adjudicated on. Besides, the ugly fact remains that Rodney sold the goods for the benefit of himself and the other captors. It is true that he afterwards declared he had no idea they would be given up by the King. But this was said in the House of Commons, and can, to speak frankly, only be accepted as true in a Parliamentary sense. Rodney cannot possibly have been ignorant that in such cases the King commonly did resign his rights. The course he took can only be made intelligible by supposing that his hatred of the rebels, combined with the

prospect of escaping for ever from poverty, overpowered his common sense.

The results of the capture of St. Eustatius were evil for his fame directly and indirectly. The attacks made on him in Parliament will be dealt with later on. We need not pay much attention, or any indeed, to the charges brought against him by French historians. It is amusing to note the unction with which the countrymen of Napoleon's marshals lift their hands in horror over the misdeeds of the British Admiral. But in Rodney's own fleet the effect was bad, and it is certain that, till he left the West Indies in July, the course of events was unfavourable to England. There exists a series of letters from Hood to Jackson of the Admiralty, begun about this time, which is painful reading. From it we can only conclude that Hood, brave man and brilliant officer as he was, was guilty of the meanest backbiting, or that Rodney forgot duty and honour alike in his eagerness to collect the booty. If the accuser is to be believed, the Admiral went very near repeating the famous trick attributed to Sir Henry Morgan the Buccaneer, who, it is said, persuaded his fellow "brothers of the coast" to entrust him with all their booty, and then ran away with it. Rodney, said Hood, carried vast sums of money to his flag-ship, and never rendered any account of them. Alongside of this, minor charges such as that Rodney would not allow his subordinate to write home, in order that people might be kept in ignorance of what was going on, sink into insignificance. All this may be discounted, for naval men, though a heroic race, pay their tribute to human weakness like others. They are sadly addicted

to grumbling and, as Rodney himself said later on, naturally censorious. Hood, however, did not speak only for himself. What he thought was thought by others. There never was any open breach between the men. Hood always obeyed orders punctually, but their mutual civility thinly covered a very genuine hostility.

It cannot be honestly denied that the course of events did often justify the criticisms of Hood. Shortly after the capture of St. Eustatius, Rodney was informed from home that a great French armament was preparing at Brest for the West Indies. It was to be commanded by Grasse. The Admiral at once sent Hood to take command off Fort Royal, raising the blockading force at the same time to fifteen sail of the line and five frigates. The object was to prevent the junction of the four ships in the port with the fleet coming from Europe. At a later period, when he was assailed in Parliament for not going to Martinique, Rodney justified his decision to remain at St. Eustatius by saying that Hood was as fit to command as he was himself. In the course of the blockade he had occasion to commend his subordinate highly for the sagacity he showed in refusing to be decoyed off his station by a false report of the appearance of the enemy elsewhere. Unfortunately he did not draw from Hood's fitness the obvious deduction that he ought to be left to fight in his own way if he was to be left in command. He yielded to what for some men is the irresistible temptation to direct operations from a distance. Napoleon was in this sort a notable sinner, and in his as in all cases this interference was the mother of confusion which is the mother of failure. Only

the man on the spot can tell what ought to be done at the moment, and he cannot act with effect if his hands are to be tied by a distant superior who does not know the facts.

In this case there was certainly failure, and, what is worse, failure foretold by Hood. He wrote to Rodney pointing out that the set of wind and current to the west made it very difficult for him to keep close to Fort Royal. An enemy coming from the eastward could, he said, hug the coast of Martinique, and slip into Fort Royal in spite of him. He therefore asked leave to cruise to windward of the island, where he would be on the track of Grasse and in a position to compel him either to fight a decisive battle or to give up the attempt to reach Fort Royal. The leave was refused. Rodney expressed a fear that the four ships in the harbour would slip out and attack our possessions, or, which had been even worse, might fall on him at St. Eustatius. The fear seems to me exaggerated. Even if the operations of the French had been bolder than they usually were, it was not likely that they would risk four ships in the middle of twenty at a time when they knew that reinforcements were coming. Hood bitterly jeered in his letters at the Admiral's fear for his plunder.

Whatever Rodney's motives may have been, the misfortune which Hood had foretold actually happened on April 28th. Grasse turned up to the north of Martinique with twenty sail of the line and a great convoy. Hugging the land closely he slipped along the shore inside of the English squadron. Hood had been reinforced and could dispose of nineteen sail, but he was to leeward in the westerly current and the treacherous

light breezes which prevail under the land. He could not work up to windward. Grasse was joined by the four ships in Fort Royal, which gave him a great superiority of force. There followed on the 29th and 30th two days of confused and distant fighting. The French admiral declared that the English admiral ran away. The English admiral asserted in good set terms that the bragging Frenchman would not come down like a man. After an immense outlay of powder and shot, Hood, finding that the enemy had united his forces, that one of his own ships was in a sinking state, and that all were in want of stores, gave up the now impossible blockade, and hastened to join Rodney in the north.

With this misfortune all our superiority of position and numbers vanished away. Rodney was thoroughly savage, and hinted pretty intelligibly that Hood had manœuvred so as to fulfil his own prophecy—a monstrous charge, which he did not venture to press. It is to be hoped for his honour that his conscience pricked him. Whether he or Hood was right as to the best way of meeting Grasse, there can, I should imagine, be only one opinion on the question whether his conduct during these months was worthy of his renown or of his actions before and afterwards. At a time when a great hostile force was approaching the station committed to his care, the proper place for an English admiral was at sea and at the head of his fleet. He should not have remained on shore with the auctioneer's hammer in his hand superintending the sale of his booty amid surroundings redolent of the redoubted Sir Henry Morgan. His health was indeed bad, but it did not prevent him from

putting to sea when informed of the arrival of Grasse. Besides, if it had been so shaken as to make him incapable of command, he was all the more bound not to interfere with the officer whom he left in the post of danger and honour. On the whole, one has to come back to the view that Rodney's eyes had been dazzled and his better nature corrupted for the time by the fairy gold poured out before him at St. Eustatius.

During the two and a half months which remained before the return of the hurricane season everything went wrong. The English admirals met on May 9th between Montserrat and Antigua. It was necessary to take Hood's battered ships into harbour in the latter island to refit. While they were so occupied the French were busy. Grasse was, no doubt, a less wary and skilful tactician than Guichen. He had faults of character which proved his ruin—faults which may be all collected under that untranslatable French word *suffisance*; but he was a clever officer. In Bouillé he had an ally of extraordinary energy. The two combined to carry out an aggressive campaign against our islands. While Rodney was refitting at Antigua, a double expedition sailed from Fort Royal. The larger part, under Grasse and Bouillé, was to attempt the recapture of Santa Lucia; the smaller, under a M. de Blanchelande, was to go south to Tobago. The attack on Santa Lucia failed, thanks, in part, to Rodney's foresight in fortifying Pigeon Island; thanks also to the accidental arrival of several English frigates, whose captains landed their men to reinforce the garrison. Bouillé disembarked his soldiers and attacked in his usual fiery style, but our fortifications round Gros Islet

Bay were too strong, and the guns on Pigeon Island kept the French fleet off. Finding that the island could not be mastered so soon as they expected, Grasse and Bouillé re-embarked their men, and followed Blanchelande to Tobago.

In the meantime Rodney was hurrying south from Antigua. He was met at sea by news of the retreat of the French from Santa Lucia, but did not learn their course. Concluding that they would probably steer for Barbadoes, which had not yet recovered the effects of the great hurricane, he hastened there at once. On his arrival he was greeted by a despatch from Captain Fergusson, the Governor of Tobago, reporting the appearance of Blanchelande with the smaller French expedition. Rear-Admiral Drake was at once sent off with six sail to help defend the island. Soon after he had gone came news that the whole French fleet was on its way to Tobago. For a time there was great fear for Drake, but he discovered his danger in time and avoided it by speedy retreat. When he had rejoined the Admiral, the whole English force sailed for Tobago, and arrived in time to be too late. After a gallant resistance, Fergusson, who was well supported by the planters, had been compelled to surrender.

Rodney found the French at sea, standing to the north along the string of little islands called the Grenadines, between Grenada and St. Vincent. They were somewhat superior in force, but he expressed his readiness to fight. No battle, however, took place. According to Rodney the French manœuvred to draw him to leeward of St. Vincent, with the intention of getting between him and Barbadoes. According to Grasse,

the English admiral, who being to eastward had the wind, made use of his advantage to avoid a battle. The French showed no eagerness to fight for their part. During the night they went back to Tobago. When Rodney discovered that they had vanished his fears for Barbadoes revived, and he returned there at once. Grasse after a short stay at Tobago returned to Fort Royal, and so ended that campaign.

The ill health of which Rodney had complained all through the year had now increased on him. He had applied for leave to come home during the hurricane months, and it had been reluctantly granted him. As it was now June, and therefore close on the dangerous season, he began to make ready. Hood was to be despatched with the bulk of the squadron to Sandy Hook. Rodney himself decided to make an attempt to go there also, and only to sail for Europe if he found himself unable to stand a northern latitude. His old flag-ship the *Sandwich* was so battered as to be unfit to stand the voyage. He therefore shifted his flag to the *Gibraltar*, which had been the *Fenix*, Don Juan de Langara's flag-ship. On August 1st he sailed, and after going as far north as the latitude of the Bahamas found himself so ill as to be compelled to renounce all intention of going on to America. He therefore steered directly for England, and after touching at Cork, arrived at Plymouth on September 19th.

CHAPTER X

RODNEY'S STAY IN ENGLAND

RODNEY'S return home was not what he might have hoped it would be a year before, or what it was destined to be when he returned from his great campaign a year later. His health was wretchedly bad, and after a very brief stay in London he went down to Bath to recruit. His son-in-law Mundy, who edited his correspondence rather in what Carlyle called the rubbish shot here style, says that he was under the necessity of consulting London surgeons for some ailment other than the gout from which he had so long suffered. As a matter of fact it was a stricture. At Bath the Admiral had a short interval of rest with his wife, his daughters, and the faithful Loup. Loup, who was perhaps entitled to an earlier mention, was a French dog whom the Admiral had brought with him from Paris in 1778—a beast obviously of the most meritorious intelligence and devotion. Surrounded by these dearly loved friends the Admiral had two months of rest for his body and mind.

Indeed he needed consolation for the second as well as for the first. The last campaign had on the whole gone against him, and his popularity was not what it

had been. Rodney might have dispensed with popular applause, but he could not help seeing that his ministerial friends were disappointed in him. There was no talk of superseding him. It was not the wont of George the Third to throw over a faithful servant who had been unsuccessful, and on such a point the Ministry would not go against the wish of the King. But there were no signs given him of welcome. The war was going against England, making the position of the Ministry harder every day. Lord North and his colleagues could not but feel that Rodney had of late done little to help them. When the news of the capture of St. Eustatius came there had been talk of a peerage for the Admiral. It was so serious that the Dûke of Chandos sent him a message through Lady Rodney offering to let him have Rodney Stoke on reasonable terms if he wished to take his title from the ancient possession of the family from which he claimed to descend. The talk ended in talk, however, as later events in the West Indies went against us. The failure at St. Vincent, the loss of Tobago under the very eyes, as the grumblers would say, of Rodney's fleet, the ease with which Grasse had made his way to Fort Royal, and the impunity with which he had subsequently ranged the West Indies in defiance as it seemed of our fleet, made a great score against us. To this we could only set off, in the way of actual advance, the capture of St. Eustatius and the Dutch post on the mainland. This had seemed a brilliant success at the time, but it did not last. When it was seen that the want of the island had neither weakened the insurgents on the continent, nor stopped the activity of the Yankee privateers,

nor made it a whit more difficult for a French admiral to keep the sea,—when finally it was found, as it soon was, that the seizure of the island had made it harder than before for Englishmen to obtain those products of the plantations which had become necessaries to them,—the popular voice turned with its usual versatility from loud applause to loud complaint. The outcry of the planters in St. Kitts, and the traders whose goods had been confiscated, found an echo in England. Their case was taken up in Parliament by the formidable voice of Burke. Rodney therefore found himself the mark for not a little obloquy.

The Admiral did not sit in silence under these attacks. He published a selection of his letters in order to prove that his conduct at St. Eustatius had been unimpeachable, and that he was not to blame for subsequent failures. The person to whom he entrusted the publication of the pamphlet turned out to be an injudicious editor, for he printed Hood's request to be allowed to cruise to windward of Martinique, which of course was to put a weapon into the hands of the Admiral's enemies. Rodney was annoyed, but the mischief was done.

In December Rodney had an opportunity of answering his enemies in Parliament. Burke moved for a committee to inquire into the circumstances of the seizure of St. Eustatius in a vehement denunciatory speech such as he only could deliver. The occasion called out both the weakness and the strength of the great orator. He saw a chance of damaging the Administration, and seized on it as a party man, in which character he was neither better nor worse than five hundred other honourable gentlemen. He also thought

he saw that the honour of England had been tarnished, and her interests sacrificed, by cruelty and greed. A man must have read Burke to very little purpose who does not know that when he was convinced he had to deal with these sins his anger was perfectly sincere and also perfectly generous. In this case he had been persuaded by the lamentations of the sufferers at St. Eustatius, and he attacked Rodney with asperity. His charges were in many cases exaggerated, and Rodney had no difficulty in disposing of them. There was, however, a substance of truth below the exaggeration, and to that the Admiral's answer was but lame. It was easy for him to show that he had not knowingly allowed provisions and naval stores to be sold to the French islands in order to fill his own pocket. It was not equally easy for him to prove that he had not gone to undue lengths in his seizures, or that he had not stayed too long at St. Eustatius. In his excuses for subsequent failures he was sadly hampered by the notorious fact that he had differed in opinion from his subordinate, and that the subordinate turned out to be right. There is far too much of the weak man's plea, "It could not be helped, and how could I know?" for Rodney's honour. On the whole one is glad to be done with a disagreeable passage in his life. The Ministerial majority being still intact, Burke's motion was of course rejected.

Rodney was now to have an opportunity of vindicating himself in another and far more effectual way. Early in December he was summoned by the King to consult on the measures to be taken to check the victorious progress of the French in America. On what from this year forward it is strictly accurate to call the coast of

the United States, the war had gone steadily against England for months. At the close of the campaign season in the West Indies, Grasse had sailed for America at the same time as Hood. There he in combination with Washington and Rochambeau carried out the operations which culminated in the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. It is just possible that if Hood had commanded for us at sea, the army under Cornwallis might have been saved, but our admiral was Graves, a thoroughly commonplace and pedantic officer. He was out-manœuvred by Grasse, and his retreat from the Chesapeake after a miserably feeble fight with the Frenchman, which was bitterly criticised by Rodney, left Cornwallis helpless in the midst of an enemy four times as numerous as his own army. The surrender of Yorktown followed on October 17th, 1781.

The news reached England in the following month. It convinced all men, even the King, that the independence of the colonies must be recognised at last, but it also showed that the war had entered on a new phase. Freed by the success of their allies from the necessity of helping the Americans, the French would now be at liberty to devote themselves to that attack on our West Indian possessions which had always been the ultimate object of their war policy. It was a matter of course that Grasse, the hurricane season being over in the West Indies, and his work on the mainland done, would hurry back to Martinique. It was known that a great armament was preparing at Brest to sail under Guichen, Rodney's old antagonist, which was to reinforce Grasse. Then the whole force in combination with the Spaniards from Havannah was to attack Jamaica. A

determined effort must be made to defeat this plan, or the war would end in disaster at sea as it had done on land.

Throughout November the Admiralty was at work preparing reinforcements for Hood, who was already outnumbered, and would be mewed up in port by an overwhelming force if Guichen reached the Antilles before our own ships. Early in December the danger had become so pressing that it was decided not to wait till all our reinforcements were ready, but to send part on as soon as they could be made ready. The King summoned Rodney to an audience and received from him the assurance that he would not waste a day in getting to sea. From the King's cabinet the Admiral hastened to Portsmouth to hoist his flag on the *Formidable* and again take up the reins.

Until the January of the following year Rodney was at work, first at Portsmouth and then at Plymouth (which in a moment of exasperation he most unjustly called a "horrid port"), superintending the fitting out of the squadron, collecting men, driving on the laggard dockyard officials, beating down the ill-will of port admirals who were sulky at real or imaginary intrusions on their authority. With this kind of opposition Rodney, well supported as he was now by the Admiralty, kept no measure. It was instantly crushed; and as for the dockyard officials, what orders could not do was effected by the crack of the whip. The Admiral could declare with pardonable pride that he had forced more work out of the yard in a month than it had done in a year before. All this drive was of course augmented by the usual torrent of applications for places or promotion

from candidates and their friends. Some of these could be neglected or refused, but to others attention must be paid. One of these came from Sandwich on behalf of a Lord Cranstoun who "is greatly patronised by the Lord Advocate." It is highly probable that if Sandwich had been divinely informed that the end of the world would occur in an hour, the ruins of the universe would have fallen on him placidly penning a request to somebody to find a place for somebody who was protected by somebody of importance. Nothing could be done for Cranstoun for the moment, but Rodney was not quite satisfied with Symonds the captain of the *Formidable*, and he decided to take the Scotch *protégé* of the Lord Advocate with him as a volunteer, and to give him the command of the flag-ship as soon as a place could be found for the other officer.

Two appointments were made at Rodney's own request which must not be passed over. Gilbert Blane was named Physician to the Fleet. This was not only an excellent administrative measure, but a well-deserved reward for past services. Since the end of 1779 Blane had sailed with Rodney, and had used his influence to introduce a number of sanitary reforms by which many hundreds of stout and well-trained seamen were preserved from fever and scurvy for the day when England's need for stout and well-trained men was great indeed. Cleanliness and good food had been his favourite prescriptions, and to them was due the excellent general health of our squadrons in the West Indies. The second appointment was that of Sir Charles Douglas as Captain of the Fleet—an officer who was occasionally appointed to help an admiral in command of a very

large force. He corresponded to the chief of the staff in an army. Douglas would be entitled to especial notice in a life of Rodney if only because of the claim made on his behalf by his son Sir Howard, the gunner—that he inspired his admiral at the great and critical moment of the battle of April 12th. But Sir Charles Douglas would be a notable man if no such claim had ever been made. It may be said of him that he did for the gunnery of the fleet what Blane did for its health. To him is due the use of the lock for firing cannon in place of the old port fire and powder horn—a change which diminished the risk of explosions and increased the accuracy of our practice. He also improved the construction of gun carriages so as to enable the cannon to be trained farther fore and aft, whereby the range of fire was materially increased. These reforms, be it noted, were made on his own initiative, and frequently at his own expense. They were adopted by other captains on his example. These two Scotchmen were admirable types of those officers who, on blue water and in the presence of the enemy, by their own efforts perfected the old sailing navy. It is not the least of Rodney's services that he saw the merits of both and used them.

While he was completing his staff and fitting his ships for sea the wind had settled in the south-west, and had imprisoned him at Plymouth. It was some consolation in this trial that the wind which kept him in Cawsand Bay would also keep Guichen in Brest. But before the end of December the fear that the Frenchman might head him in the race to the West Indies had been removed by means more glorious to us

than the help of our old allies the storms. Guichen did put to sea with his convoy, but soon after he was out he fell in with Kempenfelt, who was cruising off the mouth of the Channel. It was a wild and misty day. By a piece of mismanagement, which does little credit to his reputation as a tactician, Guichen was to leeward of his convoy. A sudden lifting of the mist revealed him to Kempenfelt, who was to windward. The English admiral swooped on his prize before the transports could run under their convoy's lee. Fifteen of them, laden with troops and stores, were captured. The others scattered in terror and were lost in the mist. Guichen returned to Brest, and in deep humiliation resigned his command.

When Kempenfelt's destruction of the reliefs for the West Indies was known, the Ministry, seeing that there was now no fear of a meeting with a superior force on the way, urged Rodney to put to sea with the ships which were actually ready, and leave the rest to follow. In words which ring like the famous appeal to Radetzky—"Austria is in thy camp," Sandwich solemnly reminded him that "the fate of this Empire is in your hands." Rodney answered the appeal. The instant that the wind, shifting a little to the north, ceased to blow directly into Plymouth Sound—then unprotected by its breakwater—he put to sea with four ships of the line, and began to fight the winds for a passage out to the ocean. The week which followed was a better test of the quality of the Admiral's nerve, and the seamanship of the little squadron round him, than a battle with Souffren himself could have been. Rodney was now sixty-four, an older man then than he would have been

at the same years now. His gout had returned on him so cruelly at Plymouth that he had been compelled to leave the very signing of his letters to Sir Charles Douglas. The wind was blowing straight in his teeth with undeviating fury. But he fought on doggedly, and at last, after a week of struggle, seamanship prevailed. On January 17th, 1782, the squadron weathered Ushant in sea which made a clean breach over such mighty three-deckers as the *Formidable* and the *Namur*. From the open sea he sent back a frigate with the news to Sandwich, and then pressed on, accompanied by storms, to the West. On February 19th he anchored in Carlisle Bay in Barbadoes. From thence he sailed to join Hood off Antigua, and was again in command of the West Indies.

CHAPTER XI

TO APRIL 12TH

WHEN the Admiral and his second in command met off Antigua it was manifest that the crisis of the war was fast approaching in the West Indies. Since Grasse had returned from the coast of North America the French had possessed a considerable superiority of force, and had used it to complete their conquest of the English islands. The bolder and more efficacious policy would have been to seek out Hood and crush him before reinforcements arrived from England. But this was at no period in the war the line taken by any French commander except Souffren. Grasse followed the traditional rules and attacked the islands. Before his arrival Bouillé had retaken St. Eustatius by a dashing surprise. When the French admiral and the governor of Martinique had again joined they fell upon St. Kitts, which lies between St. Eustatius and Antigua. A naval force of twenty-nine sail of the line conveyed Bouillé's soldiers, and the expedition landed in January. It was far too strong to be resisted by the small English garrison under General Fraser—the more because the planters, being thoroughly sulky since the confiscation of their goods at St. Eustatius, refused to give him any help. He retired

with his soldiers to Brimstone Hill, and fortifying himself there, held out in the hope that relief would come.

The news of the attack reached Hood at Barbadoes, and he saw at once that honour and interest alike required that an effort should be made. He shipped a small force of soldiers under General Prescott and sailed for St. Kitts. The manœuvring and fighting which followed make what Cortes would have called a *muy hermosa cosa*—a very pretty piece of work. The French were stronger by seven sail of the line, but Hood had decided to attack them where they were anchored near the Basseterre Bank to cover the troops on shore. His plan was defeated through the gross misconduct of the officer of the watch of one of our frigates, who threw his vessel right across the bows of the leading liner, and caused a collision which entailed a waste of invaluable time. The approaching English fleet was seen by Grasse, who got up anchor and stood to sea. By steady manœuvring Hood kept between him and the land. Then he ran in and anchored at Basseterre himself, thus cutting Grasse off from Bouillé. The Frenchman, furious at finding himself outmanœuvred, made three attacks on the English, but Hood had anchored close on the tail of the bank, and had placed his ships so admirably for mutual support, that the enemy was beaten off with loss. General Prescott was landed, and an effort made to relieve Fraser. But the English military force was too weak to raise the siege of Brimstone Hill, and soon fell back to secure the protection of the guns of the fleet.

For some weeks these various land and sea forces remained in a curiously complicated position. Fraser at Brimstone Hill was besieged by Bouillé, who was

threatened by Prescott from Basseterre. Hood while covering Prescott was threatened by Grasse, who lay out at sea watching him. Reinforcements had arrived which raised the French to over thirty vessels. At last Brimstone Hill surrendered. There was nothing to be gained by holding on to Basseterre any longer. On February 17th Hood re-embarked Prescott's men, and summoned his captains on board the *Barfleur*. Every man's watch was set by the Admiral's, and orders were given that at ten o'clock exactly every cable was to be cut, and the fleet was to slip to sea under the shadow of the land. At sundown the riding lights of the English fleet were hoisted on boats anchored outside of them. At the appointed time the axes of the carpenter's gangs fell on the cables from end to end of the fleet, and Hood slipped to sea leaving the lights on the boats to mislead the French till daylight. When it came, a few flecks of white on the horizon made by the topsails of Hood's ships told Grasse that the enemy, who had outmanœuvred him all along, had baffled him again. The effort to save St. Kitts had failed from want of means, but it was gallantly made. The success with which an inferior English force had defied the French, and had outmanœuvred them, greatly raised our spirits after the last unlucky months. His failure had discredited Grasse, and had tended to increase the already existing ill-will between him and his second and third in command, Vaudreuil and Bougainville.

The junction with Rodney had raised the English force nearer to an equality with the French. Grasse was not minded, however, to fight a battle. His orders were to make ready for that attack on Jamaica which

was to put a triumphant finish to the war. So, taking Bouillé on board again, he returned to Fort Royal in Martinique. Rodney went south to Gros Islet Bay in Santa Lucia—his old headquarters—and there resumed his watch on the enemy.

It was known on both sides that a decisive battle lay ahead of them. Rodney had written to Parker at Jamaica immediately on reaching the West Indies, warning him of the approaching attack. The French, he informed him, would certainly make an effort to fall on the Greater Antilles soon. For his part he would do his best to fight them to windward, but if they slipped through his fingers there, then he would follow them to the west, would join Parker, and the battle would be fought off Jamaica. In any case there would be a battle. During March both fleets were making ready. Both expected and received reinforcements. The ships which were fitting out in England when Rodney left, followed him soon, and their arrival raised his force to thirty-six sail of the line with a good proportion of frigates. In the meantime another expedition had been fitted out at Brest to replace that broken up by Kempenfelt in December. It was commanded by Captain Mithon de Genouilly, and it reached Fort Royal safely in spite of us before the end of March. On this occasion, also, one has to confess that Rodney differed in opinion from Hood, and that his measures did not succeed. Hood argued that the French in their anxiety to arrive safely would avoid the neighbourhood of the English station at Santa Lucia, and he asked for leave to cruise well to the north among the Antilles. Rodney replied that the French had always entered the West Indies by the

passage between Martinique and Dominica, and would certainly do so again. He therefore stationed Hood off this passage, and ordered him to stay there. The calculation that the French would adhere to the old routine was shrewd enough, and fairly justified by their conduct of the war, but on this occasion it turned out to be mistaken. Mithon de Genouilly steered a more northerly course. He entered the West Indies by Deseada, which is just off Guadaloupe to the east, and then, hugging the leeward side of the islands, got safe into Fort Royal. Whether the disposition preferred by Hood would have barred his road we cannot tell. To have divided our force as widely as he recommended might have been a dangerous step in the presence of a bold enemy, and Rodney perhaps did well to avoid the risk that even Grasse would throw over the cautious French tactics once in a way. But he was certainly keenly disappointed by the escape of Mithon de Genouilly, all the more because he had expressed the fullest confidence in the measures taken to stop him. A squadron being no longer needed to windward of Martinique, Hood was recalled to Santa Lucia, and the English fleet was kept ready to start in pursuit the instant the look-out frigates saw Grasse standing out from Fort Royal. It was Rodney's last disappointment.

The two fleets were now within one ship equal in point of numbers. Grasse was, however, hampered by a great convoy of merchant vessels which had to be seen safely to San Domingo—a charge which very materially affected his manœuvres when he did at last get to sea. They were trading vessels, not transports. The troops which were to be landed in Jamaica were embarked

on the war-ships, and with them the battering-train. Bouillé was not to go in command this time, as the Spanish Government insisted that an island which, by the terms of their compact with France, was to be conquered for Spain, should be attacked under the direction of a Spanish general. His supersession made no difference, as things turned out; but if the combined expedition had actually reached Jamaica, it would have been all to our advantage. Until April 8th the two fleets remained at anchor—the French getting ready at Fort Royal; the English waiting to start in pursuit from Santa Lucia, some forty miles to the south. All leave was stopped on our ships. Neither officer nor man landed except on duty. A line of frigates patrolled the space between the two ports within signalling distance of one another.

At last, on the 8th, the *Andromache* frigate, commanded by Captain Byron—"an active, brisk, and intelligent officer," according to Rodney—was seen standing in for Santa Lucia with the signal flying which told that the French were getting to sea. Within two hours the English were out, and in pursuit. The shortest route for the French would have been across the Caribbean Sea to their rendezvous with the Spaniards on the coast of San Domingo. But Grasse could not take that course without incurring the certainty of being caught up by the pursuer. There is much dispute between the writers of the time as to which of the two fleets, French and English, sailed better, each asserting that the other had the quicker heels. In this case, however, there could be no doubt that the English, having a greater number of coppered ships, could have

overhauled the enemy. Besides, Grasse would have been hampered by his lumbering merchantmen. As it was his duty to save them, and his cue to avoid a battle till he had effected his junction with the Spaniards, it was probable that he would take the alternative route—that he would hug the western or leeward side of the islands and stand to the north, partly because this course would give him the better chance of keeping the weather-gage, and partly because it would enable him to stand in guard over his convoy by keeping it between himself and the land. So Rodney acted on the supposition that Grasse would go northward, and through the night of April 8th he steered in that direction past Martinique. On the morning of the 9th the English fleet was off Dominica, and it was seen that Rodney had judged rightly. There to north and east of our ships were the French fleet and convoy.

Rodney and Grasse were now face to face on their decisive field of battle. This field is the stretch of water which extends along the west side of Dominica to the southern point of Guadaloupe—a length of nearly fifty miles. It is subject to conditions which dictated the course of the next four days of fighting and manœuvres as effectually as ever mountain, wood, or river shaped a battle on land. The island of Dominica is twenty-seven miles long, it runs from east of south to west of north, and it is full of hills. The Morne Diablotin, about nine miles from the northern point, is four thousand seven hundred and forty-seven feet high. These hills had not a little to do with the coming battles. Twenty-one miles to the north, and a little to the west of Dominica, is the southern point of the French island of Guadaloupe.

The passage between the two is not, however, for purposes of navigation twenty-one miles wide. At about fifteen miles from the northern point of Dominica it is interrupted by a string of small islands called the Saints, which extend five miles from E.N.E. to W.S.W. They give its name to the strait—the Saints' Passage. These fifty miles of water are divided very sharply into two zones, so to speak, by the winds which blow over them. The open water between Dominica and Guadaloupe is swept by the Easterly Trades. But these winds are broken by the high land of Dominica. All along the western side of the island there is a belt of water which is subject to calms, or to variable land and sea breezes. It is obvious, therefore, that a great fleet, manœuvring in these waters, and extended in a line of battle miles long, might be in two winds. One end of it might be in the "true breeze" blowing through the Saints' Passage, while the other was in the variable breezes blowing off, or along, or on to the shore. It might even happen that one half of the fleet might have the wind while the other was becalmed under the land. As a matter of fact we shall see that both fleets were subject to these various conditions from the 9th to the 12th April, and that the whole course of the fighting was largely dictated by them.

At daylight on the 9th, English and French were alike becalmed under Dominica. Grasse had his convoy of merchant ships huddled together in Prince Rupert's Bay, an anchorage about three miles long and one deep on the north-western side of the island. To seaward and to the south of them were the thirty-five liners and the frigates of his fleet. The English were

opposite the central and southern parts of the island, arranged in a long roughly-formed line. Sir Samuel Hood with the ships of the van was farthest to the north; Rodney was in the centre to the south of him; farthest south and farthest from the enemy was Rear-Admiral Drake with his division. Two of the French ships, the *Auguste* and the *Zélé*, were at some distance from their own fleet and near the English. As the sun rose the southerly breezes got up along the coast of the island. They were very partial, and broken all day long by calms. The first of the great host of ships now collected under the island to feel them were the nine immediately around Sir Samuel Hood. He at once formed his line, and stretched ahead, aiming to cut off the isolated French ships. One of them might have been actually separated but for the rigidity of the discipline which prevailed in the English fleet. As the breeze reached her, this vessel stood in towards her own fleet, steering close-hauled across the head of the English. She came so near that the leading ship, the *Alfred*, was compelled to bear up to avoid a collision. Officers and men in Hood's ships waited eagerly for the order to open fire, but it never came. Hood was watching the mast of the *Formidable* for the order to begin, but it was never hoisted, for some unexplained reason, and the bold Frenchman rejoined Grasse untouched. This was an instance of the punctilious obedience which is only just better than disobedience—the action of a man who is resolved to accept no responsibility, and to leave his commander all the burden; but it was not disapproved by Rodney.

When the wind reached the French ships, Grasse

at once ordered his convoy to make their way to Guadaloupe to the north-west and leeward. Two liners were sent with them, and before night they were all out of sight. With the thirty-three ships which remained to him, Grasse resolved to work to windward past the Saints. He knew that Rodney would follow him and not the traders, which would therefore be safe, and he calculated on his own power of avoiding a battle by keeping to windward. It is just possible that if he had gone off at once he might have worked through the passage, while only half the English had the wind. Some of his vessels were, however, dangerously near Hood, and might have fallen behind. Neither interest nor honour permitted him to sacrifice them, and then, too, he saw a chance of crippling the English pursuit by an attack on the isolated van.

That he had the chance is beyond question. If, in Rodney's own language, he "had come down as he should," Hood might have been surrounded, cut off, and crushed by numbers long before our becalmed ships could come up. Some at least of our van must have fallen into the hands of the enemy. But we were saved by that pedantic adherence to the line of battle which had been the rule with both fleets, and then by the rule which bound a French admiral to subordinate an opportunity of immediate advantage to his ultimate object. Grasse would not come to close quarters from fear of being entangled into a damaging battle. He decided to range past Hood's ships to windward at half-cannon shot, and fire to cripple his rigging. The manœuvre, such as it was, was neatly performed. During the forenoon of the 9th about half the French ships

under the direct command of Vaudreuil were engaged in ranging past Hood, then, when they reached the end of his line, tacking to windward to return to their starting-point, and pass along from end to end again. The English ships lay with their topsails to the mast, taking the Frenchmen's fire and returning it. More than half the English ships were mere spectators of the battle. The calms kept them helpless, but towards mid-day a few of them, by trimming their sails to every cat's-paw of wind, contrived to work up. Rodney's flagship the *Formidable* was one of these, and was steered between the land and Hood in the hope of cutting off some of the French ships. As they were seen to be coming up, Grasse at once hauled off to windward. There was some more distant cannonading, but the Frenchman had thrown away a magnificent chance, and fortune gave him no other. A few of Hood's ships had indeed been damaged. Captain Bayne of the *Alfred* had been killed, and the damage to the squadron was sufficiently severe to induce Rodney to order it to change places with the rear, giving a promise, however, that so soon as another battle seemed imminent it should return to the place of honour. For the rest, none of the English ships were so damaged as to be unable to take part in the battle of the 12th. Our fire, too, had been very steady and quick. The French had masts and spars to replace, so that their flight was as much hampered as our pursuit. The action is, in fact, an admirable example of the rule that half-hearted operations in war are always disastrous. Grasse would not risk his fleet in order to crush a part of the English, and so he left his enemy intact to ruin him and his "ultimate objects" together three days later.

The night of the 9th and whole of the 10th were spent by the two fleets in repairing damages. Calms and cat's-paws of wind kept them rolling harmlessly in sight of one another. During the night of the 10th the *Zélé*, which was built to bring the French fleet into trouble, ran into the *Junon*, and so damaged her that she had to be sent off to Guadaloupe. The *Caton*, too, was found to be so ill rigged that Grasse got rid of her likewise, and thus reduced his fleet to thirty-one vessels. All through the 11th the wind gave Rodney no chance of forcing on an action. The French were beating to windward through the passage, or gradually wriggling out from under the land. By evening most of them were out of sight. Rodney had hitherto kept his fleet in line of battle, but when he saw that the escape of the French had become a question of an hour or two, he ordered a general chase of the few which still remained to leeward of the Saints. The best sailers of the English fleet were soon close upon them, and they were signalling for help. It was, of course, impossible for Grasse to leave them to their fate, and he came bowling back before the wind to protect them. He saved them from capture, but he lost all the advance he had made by a day of laborious tacking. Before dark the whole French fleet was back to leeward of the Saints. Rodney recalled his chasing ships, and stood with his whole fleet to the south. It was too late to fight a battle now, but he wished to draw the French on and so make it double sure that he would find them on the, for them, wrong side of the passage next morning. The orders of the English fleet were to stand to the south till two in the morning, and then tack to

the north. Rodney turned in with the well-grounded conviction that when day broke the French would be seen by the morning watch much where they had been left over-night.

It was extremely unlikely that the French fleet would in any case succeed in doing by night what it had failed to do by day, but at two in the morning, just when the English fleet was coming round to the north again, an event happened which made the battle of the following day inevitable. The *Zélé* with the others was tacking at the mouth of the passage, endeavouring not to lose if she could not gain ground in the trade wind. In the dark she met the *Ville de Paris*, Grasse's own splendid flag-ship. The *Zélé* was on the port, the *Ville de Paris* on the starboard tack. According to the express orders of the admiral, and according to what is now the universal rule of the road at sea, it was the duty of the *Zélé* to put her helm up and go under the stern of the flag-ship. But the great gods were weary of Grasse's peddling. They blinded the officer of the watch on the *Zélé*. He luffed, endeavoured to cross the bow of the flag-ship, and ran smash into her. The *Zélé* had her bowsprit snapped off short, and her foremast carried away just above the deck. The two vessels were entangled, wind and current swept them to leeward before they could be got clear. Then Grasse ordered the *Astrée* frigate, commanded by the famous and unlucky La Perouse, to take the *Zélé* in tow.

It was two hours before the cable was made fast, and they were on their way to Guadaloupe. By daylight, about five o'clock, Grasse and the ships closest to him

had fallen to leeward. When the first rays of the sun showed them to the English fleet, now heading towards them, they were stretching over from nine to fifteen miles of water to westward of the Saints. Sir Charles Douglas, who was already up on board the *Formidable*, saw that the course of the English would cut right through them. He hurried down to the Admiral's cabin to report that "God had given him his enemy on the lee bow." From Rodney to the youngest middy in the fleet, all men saw that the battle was coming now.

CHAPTER XII

THE BREAKING OF THE LINE[1]

THE great importance of this battle seems to justify a survey of the strength of the two fleets which took

[1] The reader must be warned at this point that the battle of April 12th, 1782, has been the subject of a long and angry controversy. It was promoted partly by the zeal of certain Scotchmen, partly by the filial piety of General Sir Howard Douglas, the well-known writer on gunnery, son of Sir Charles Douglas, who was Rodney's captain of the fleet. The matter in dispute was the respective claims of Clerk of Eldin and Sir Charles Douglas to the credit of inspiring or guiding the Admiral at the critical moment of the battle. As is usually the case, the controversy has been marked by much angry contradiction, much confusion between matters of fact and matters of opinion, much lax use of words on both sides. Of the witnesses quoted, some are only accessible at second hand, some were boys at the time of the battle who gave their evidence years afterwards; one who was not a boy, and told his story immediately afterwards, is suspected, because he had reasons of a personal character to regard Rodney with animosity. I have not thought it necessary to enter into the controversy in this narrative, but have endeavoured to the best of my ability to make the battle out from all the evidence, and tell it as, to me, it appears to have passed. The bulk of the evidence will be found in the *Quarterly Review* for January 1830, the *Edinburgh Review* for April 1830, the *United Service Magazine*, vols. xi. and xiii., and in the various *Statements* of Sir Howard Douglas. Full accounts of the battle are to be found in Beatson's *Annals*, vol. vi., in Captain White's *Naval Researches*, and in Captain Matthews' plans of the naval battles of the war. These two officers were both present.

part in it. As the result of that survey, common honesty extorts the confession that the English were distinctly the stronger of the two in ships and guns. Very legitimate national pride enables us to add that it was also much the better. On that day Rodney had under his command thirty-six sail of the line, including five three-deckers, carrying in all two thousand six hundred and seventy-four guns. In addition to these weapons, some at least of the English ships carried carronades—short guns with a large bore, very effective at close quarters—which, being mounted on hitherto vacant spaces on the upper-deck as an experiment, were not counted in the nominal armament, but did add materially to the weight of the fire. Grasse had thirty sail of the line, including one three-decker, carrying in all two thousand two hundred and forty-six guns. The carronade was not as yet in use in the French service. We had therefore a superiority of six ships and two hundred and fourteen guns in a broadside, without counting the carronades. On the other hand, the French ships were generally larger vessels rate for rate than ours, and the calibre of their guns heavier. Ingenious attempts have been made to show that by virtue of the size of their ships, and the weight of the individual guns, the French were really equal if not superior to us. Sir Charles Douglas even calculated that they were two seventy-fours to the good. But our guns were quite big enough for the work they had to do, and battles are won by a superiority of sufficient blows. That we were materially stronger than our enemy cannot, I think, be honestly denied.

In this calculation, too, Sir Charles was less than

just to himself. The improvements which he had introduced into our gunnery were part of our effective strength. His locks and his carriages enabled such of our ships as had adopted them both to fire quicker and to train their guns farther fore and aft than the French, whereby an Englishman passing an enemy on opposite tacks could get him under fire sooner, and keep him under it longer than he could answer. This was a kind of superiority which may be quoted with pride, for it was the fruit of intelligent and zealous work. The spirit which animated Sir Charles was shared by other captains also. There had been a great development of professional zeal during the war, and in many ways the fittings of our ships had been improved—for which let thanks be once more given to the power enjoyed by our captains. The crews, too, collected early in the war by hook and by crook, in the fashion already described, had been brought into admirable discipline. Long cruising in fleets had given our officers a complete knowledge of the qualities of their vessels as compared with others—a very necessary kind of knowledge indeed when a number of ships were to manœuvre together. Finally the spirit of the fleet was high. In spite of the little success gained in the war hitherto, our officers and men believed themselves to be better seamen and gunners than the French, and had been confirmed in that belief by the fighting near St. Kitts. They only wanted a chance. The disaster at Yorktown and the danger of England had roused the patriotism of our seamen, whether on quarter-deck or forecastle, and that emotion had swept the "spirit of faction" out of their hearts. In Sandwich's words, they knew that the

fate of the Empire was in their hands, and they did not intend that it should be lost for want of fierce fighting. Whatever Hood might think of Rodney, it was certain that he would obey punctually, and would do his utmost to damage the King's enemies. In that respect he had a superiority over the French better than many ships and guns. There was no such spirit among the French officers and men. There was the gallantry of their race, there were knowledge and discipline; but there was no enthusiasm, and not much real aptitude for the work of sea-fighting. The jealousies which divided officers of all ranks were not controlled by a high patriotic spirit, and the qualities of the crews had sunk since the beginning of the war as the well-trained men were swept off and replaced by others drawn from a poorer maritime population than ours.

That every man may have his fair share of honour, the list of the two fleets is here given in the order in which they went into battle.

THE ENGLISH FLEET

SHIPS	GUNS	CAPTAINS
Marlborough	74	Taylor Penny.
Arrogant	74	Samuel Cornish.
Alcide	74	Charles Thompson.
Nonsuch	74	William Truscott.
Conqueror	74	George Balfour.
Princesse	70	Samuel Drake, Rear-Admiral. Charles Knatchbull.
Prince George	98	James Williams.
Torbay	74	John Gidoin.
Anson	64	William Blair.
Janie	74	Robert Barber.
Russel	74	James Saumarez.

SHIPS	GUNS	CAPTAINS
America	64	Samuel Thompson.
Hercules	74	Henry Savage.
Prothée	64	Charles Buckner.
Résolution	74	Robert Manners.
Agamemnon	64	Benjamin Caldwell.
Duke	98	Alan Gardner.
Formidable	98	G. B. Rodney, Admiral. Charles Douglas. John Symonds. Cranstoun.
Namur	90	Inglis.
Saint Albans	64	William Cornwallis.
Canada	74	Thomas Dumaresq.
Repulse	64	Charrington.
Ajax	74	Robert Fanshawe.
Bedford	74	Affleck, Commodore. Grave.
Prince William	64	George Wilkinson.
Magnificent	74	Robert Linzee.
Centaur	74	John Inglefield.
Belliqueuse	64	Alexander Sutherland.
Warrior	74	James Wallace.
Monarch	74	Francis Reynolds.
Barfleur	90	Samuel Hood, Vice-Admiral.
Valiant	74	John Knight.
Yarmouth	64	S. G. Goodall.
Montagu	74	Anthony Parry.
Alfred	74	George Brown.
Royal Oak	74	Thomas Burnett.

FRENCH FLEET

Hercule	74	Chadeau de la Clocheterie.
Souverain	74	De Glandevés.
Palmier	74	De Martelly Chautard.
Northumberland	74	De Sainte Césaire.
Neptune	74	Renaud d'Aleins.
Auguste	80	De Bougainville, Chef d'Escadre. De Castellan.

SHIPS	GUNS	CAPTAINS
Ardent	64	De Gouzillon.
Scipion	74	Clave.
Brave.	74	D'Amblimont.
Citoyen	74	D'Ethy.
Hector	74	De la Vicomté.
César.	74	De Marigny.
Dauphin Royal	70	De Roquefeuil Montpéroux.
Languedoc	80	D'Arros d'Argelos.
Ville de Paris	104	Comte de Grasse, Lieut.-Gén. De Lavilléon.
Couronne	80	Mithon de Genouilly.
Eveillé	64	Le Gardeur de Tilly.
Sceptre	74	De Vaudreuil.
Glorieux	74	D'Escars.
Diadème	74	De Monteclerc.
Destin	74	Dumaitz de Goimpy.
Magnanime	74	Le Béque.
Refléchi	64	De Médine.
Conquérant.	74	De la Grandière.
Magnifique	74	Macarty Macteigne.
Triomphant	80	De Vaudreuil, Chef d'Escadre. Le Chevalier du Paullion.
Bourgogne	74	De Charitte.
Duc de Bourgogne	80	Coriolis d'Espinouse. De Champmartin.
Marseillais	74	De Castellane Majastre.
Pluton	74	D'Albert de Rions.

When Rodney was summoned by his captain of the fleet at daybreak on the 12th, and came on deck to see with his eyes the proof that his calculation of the night before was correct, the French were straggling over a space variously estimated at nine or at fifteen miles from east to west to the north-east of him. The English were in a rough oval drawn from north to south. Hood had resumed his proper place in the van; Rodney was in the centre; Rear-Admiral Drake in the

rear. A line carried out from the leading English ship would bisect the French. As the wind was from south of east, the trade wind of the West Indies, all the Frenchmen to the west of that line were on the Admiral's lee-bow, which meant that he had every chance of forcing a battle on them before they could again get away to windward. To the west of the French was seen the crippled *Zélé* in tow of the *Astrée* going to Guadaloupe. Rodney at once decided to try whether he could not, by threatening these two vessels, draw the French admiral still farther to leeward. Orders were given to some of the best sailers in Hood's division to chase. As soon as they had stood well out from among the English ships the effect of the measure was manifest. Signals fluttered up the mainmast of the *Ville de Paris*, and the French ships were seen to be coming down to cover the *Zélé*, and to be steering to take their places in the line of battle ahead, and astern of their admiral. This meant that Grasse had sacrificed what remained to him of the windward position, and the fleets were now equal as regards the wind. There was no time to be lost. At once—it was now about a quarter to seven—the chasing ships were recalled, but in order to avoid the delay which would be caused by waiting till they resumed their place, Rodney decided to order the rear to lead into action. Thus, while the chasing ships were returning to their post in the van, the ships farthest from the enemy hauled to the wind and stood to the north-east between the bulk of the fleet and the land of Dominica. Each ship fell into place as her turn came, the chasing ships from the van arriving in time to take their post in what had now become the rear. In Captain

Matthews' plans the ships of Admiral Drake's division may be seen curling over the fleet, and pointing at the French like the tail of the scorpion. The line was formed with rapidity and without a hitch. It was, in technical language, a line ahead on the starboard tack at a cable's length asunder—each ship was, that is to say, two hundred yards in front of or behind the other in a line. From the first ship to the last there was, when the formation was complete, a distance of more than five miles.

While the line was forming, the fleet went to breakfast. Every man not actually at work, or the wheel, hastened to get all the food he could. In the Admiral's cabin a party sat down with the appetite of warriors whom death could not daunt, and the care of veterans who foresaw the extreme probability that no more victuals might be attainable for the rest of that day. Douglas, the captain of the fleet; Symonds, the captain of the *Formidable*; Paget, the Admiral's secretary; Gilbert Blane, his doctor; and a few others who messed at the Admiral's table, sat down with Rodney. Cranstoun remained on deck to watch the enemy. In the middle of breakfast he came down with the news that on the course they were then following the English would cut through the French. Grasse had formed on the port tack, and was standing to the south-east across the northerly course of the English. It was his natural object to place himself across the mouth of the passage, and to windward of the English if he could. The two fleets were now running along two lines which formed an obtuse angle, of which the apex pointed to the east. Whichever reached that apex first would weather the

other. Cranstoun's message showed that the French would win the race. They had (though there is some doubt on the point) been slightly favoured by a shift of the trade wind to the north. Rodney made no answer to Cranstoun, and doubtless thought the occasion called for none. He had always preferred to engage to leeward, as he did in his battle with Langara. The windward position was only valuable to him because it would enable him to force on an action. Now, when it was a case with the French of "fight they will, and fight they must," he cared not a jot whether or no they weathered the head of his line. His position compelled the enemy's admiral to give battle. As it turned out ill for him he has been severely criticised by his countrymen, who do not seem to understand that their complaints are in truth a confession of inferiority. The experience of the previous day had shown that Rodney could not be shaken off. On the morning of the 12th Grasse had to choose between running away to Guadaloupe with the English after him, or standing as he was now doing across their van. If he had endeavoured to get away on the opposite tack he would have been unable to clear the Saints, and he would have been taken in a trap. Not to have fought in these circumstances would have been to acknowledge that a French fleet could not hope to meet an English one on anything approaching to equal terms. The plan of Grasse was a good plan enough. He hoped to cross the English van, to cripple a few of the ships, then, when he had reached a convenient place for tacking, to turn to windward, and make off while Rodney was refitting his damaged ships.

The feasibility of this plan depended, for Grasse,

on his power to keep at long bowls. If a close action could be forced on them his ships would be unable to tack under the English fire. A close action was forced. At some moment between seven and eight o'clock the leading English ship, the *Marlborough*, came within range. If the upper side of the obtuse angle spoken of above is prolonged we shall get the relative position of the fleets pretty accurately. The English formed the lower line and they impinged on the French at about the ninth ship—the *Brave*. Rodney had hoisted the signal to engage close to leeward. When, therefore, Captain Taylor Penny of the *Marlborough* found himself within musket-shot range of the *Brave* he put his helm up, and turning a little to port, led the English line close along the French. Our enemy was as yet barely in order. Bougainville, who commanded the van, had just taken his place. Their rear was still in confusion, and Vaudreuil, who commanded there, afterwards declared that he formed his line under small-arm fire. We have now to figure to ourselves the two fleets filing past one another, cannonading as they went. Both were going very slowly. The wind was light; it was necessary to go at something below the speed of the slowest ship, since all must retain the power to shoot ahead if required, and so they filed slowly along at about three and a half miles an hour. Their course would have carried the leading French ships away from the English, but Grasse ordered them to bear down, with the intention of putting our leading vessels under the utmost possible amount of fire before they reached his centre and rear. Each fleet was soon engaged from the leading ship, and the two lines hurtled past one

another in opposite directions. The English, having a margin of wind to draw on, used it to hug the French close—so close that, as Thesiger, an officer of the *Formidable*, said, it would have been possible to throw a cold shot on board them as they went past. At that range the carronades of the English ships did great execution. On board the French, which were crowded with the soldiers who were to have conquered Jamaica, the slaughter was terrible, and the effect of it soon visible, first in the number of the dead, or sometimes only badly wounded, who were hurled overboard to the sharks, and then in the slackening fire of the French. Gilbert Blane has left it on record that although our enemy's fire was effective at long ranges, it grew wild and irregular at close quarters. We could, he says, actually see the Frenchmen running from their guns in spite of the determined efforts of the officers to keep them steady. Captain Savage of the *Hercules*, who suffered as badly from the gout as his Admiral, had a chair placed for himself in the waist of his ship, and sat there leaning over the bulwarks ironically saluting the passing enemy.

When the battle had lasted about an hour, and the English van had almost reached the French rear, their admiral thought it was time to turn to windward, and hoisted the order to do so twice. But the orders could not possibly be obeyed. The French ships were yard-arm to yard-arm with the English, and if they had tacked now would have been raked and rendered helpless. Many of the ships cannot even have seen the signals in the fog of smoke now hanging over both fleets. France had to "undergo her fate." Grasse

bore on to the south, and at about nine the English van had passed the last ship of his rear. On emerging from the rolling masses of smoke the captains looked eagerly back for the signals at the towering mast-head of the *Formidable*. As they looked they saw a great three-decker heading north out of the cloud and the flames. For a moment they thought the French admiral had doubled back on them, but as the three-decker cleared the smoke they saw the cross of St. George, and knew that the *Formidable* had burst through the French line to windward.

The movement had not been premeditated by Rodney, and the signal to engage to leeward was still flying when he passed to windward. The decision to depart from the old routine, according to which the English fleet would have passed along the French and then have tacked back on it—that decision which may be said to have affected the whole immediate future of England—was sudden, was taken on the spur of the moment, was equally unexpected by victor and vanquished. So much is certain; but the exact circumstances under which it was done, and what share of the credit ought to fall to whom, is the subject of the controversy spoken of in the note at the beginning of this chapter. The courteous reader is asked to remember that the incidents now about to be narrated have been most diversely told, and still more diversely interpreted.

A glance at the list of ships given above will show that the *Formidable* was exactly in the middle of the English line, being the eighteenth of the thirty-six men-of-war in it. As the French van bore in upon ours she was engaged with each of their ships in succession.

The fleets were slipping slowly along, and it was well on for ten o'clock before the *Formidable* passed the eighteenth vessel in the French line. She had gone close to them all, firing as soon as her guns could be trained forward to meet, and as long as they could be trained aft to follow, each foe as she defiled past. Then between each bout of fire there would be a pause as the *Formidable* came opposite the vacant space between the ships in the French line, and having sent her last broadside after one was training it forward to meet the next comer. It must have been at a little before half-past nine that Rodney and Grasse, whose ship was the fifteenth in the French line, saluted each other with the cannon of their three-deckers. Up to now there had been nothing to distinguish this from the ordinary sea-fights of the eighteenth century save the number of the ships engaged and the closeness of the engagement.

A chair had been placed on the quarter-deck of the *Formidable* for the Admiral, and he rested on it except when he was walking through the cabins under the poop, to the gallery astern, from which he could watch the ships of his line behind him. On the quarter-deck with him were several whose names must not be passed over. Sir Charles Douglas was there with his *aides*—little middies—of whom one, Charles Dashwood, a boy of thirteen, is associated more closely than his seniors at the time would have thought possible with the memories of the victory. Near the wheel stood Frederick Thesiger, he who afterwards carried Nelson's letter to the Regent of Denmark after the battle of the Baltic. Thesiger had completed his time as midshipman, and was waiting for his lieutenant's commission. He had

been chosen on the recommendation of Captain Symonds to stand by the wheel and see that the quartermasters executed orders punctually. Gilbert Blane, not being one of the medical staff of the ship, employed himself during the early stage in helping to provide work for the French doctors. He worked at a gun in the fore-cabin till he was tired

It was thirsty work fighting in the thick pall of sulphurous smoke in which the gunpowder soon wrapped a ship. Rodney, in one of his turns through the cabins, called one of the middies and told him to mix a tumbler of lemonade. The middy went to work, and, having nothing more handy for the purpose, stirred the brew up with the hilt of his dirk. "Child, child," said the Admiral, "that may do for the midshipmen's mess. Drink that lemonade yourself, and send my steward here"—which order the middy obeyed with alacrity.

When eighteen of the Frenchmen had gone by, each carrying away marks of the *Formidable's* broadside, the Admiral was standing on the quarter-deck, and with him was Gilbert Blane. The high bulwarks on either side, and the hammocks stacked across the front of the quarter-deck in a barricade, shut in the view. Rodney wished to take a look at the French line, and, accompanied by Blane, stepped out on the starboard gangway. They had just passed the *Sceptre*, and leaning over the rails of the gangway they saw the *Glorieux*, seventy-four, rolling down on them. She had just taken the fire of Captain Alan Gardner in the *Duke*, ninety-eight, a splendidly-efficient three-decker, and was reeling from the shock. Her captain, the Vicomte d'Escars (a name it is now thought correct to spell Des Cars), a gentle-

man of the house of Fitzjames, had been killed, and hurled overboard to the sharks. His lieutenant, Trogoff de Kerlessi, had nailed the white flag with the golden lilies to the stump of a mast. Rodney and Blane saw the Frenchmen on the upper-deck throwing away rammers and sponges, and running from the guns. A glance showed Rodney that the wind was forcing the *Glorieux* down on him, and that she was almost about to touch. His broadsides were being aimed low, but not sufficiently low for that. She had enough, but she must be crushed, and knocked out of the French line. "Now," said Rodney to the doctor, "comes the fight for the body of Patroclus." He looked round for a messenger. None was at hand, and he turned to Blane, saying, "Run down and tell them to elevate their metal." The phrase was obscure to the doctor in spite of his experience as a gunner, but Hudibras came to his help. He remembered that it is the nature of guns that, "the higher are their pitches the lower they let down their breeches." He ran down with the order—which meant that the muzzles of the guns were to be depressed to fire a sinking broadside—and so deprived posterity of an admirable witness of what happened on the *Formidable's* quarter-deck during the next few minutes.

In these minutes was taken the decision which gave its exceptional and vital importance to the battle. While Rodney and Blane were speaking in the gangway, or just before, there had come a shift in the wind which affected the southern half of the two fleets simultaneously but diversely. It was one of those currents of air common enough in the neighbourhood of land, and it

came from the south-east, striking on the bows of the French and the sterns of the English. Our vessels going before the wind had only to trim their sails a little to keep their place. But it threatened to take the French aback, to blow right ahead of them, and stop their way. To avoid this they were compelled to turn to the right, which had the effect of throwing them into what the French call a chequer, we a bow and quarter line—that is to say, that instead of following one another in a line, they were suddenly spun round into the position of the half-closed lathes of a venetian blind. The already existing confusion in the French line was immensely increased, and a great gap appeared just astern of the *Glorieux*, which was now right on the starboard bow of the *Formidable*, caused probably by the fact that the *Diadème*, the next succeeding Frenchman, was forced across the bows of the English flag-ship.

Sir Charles Douglas was at this moment leaning on the hammocks in the front of the quarter-deck, and he saw the evidence of the existing confusion in the French line. That he realised the whole extent of it we need not believe, but he saw the gap, and he saw that by passing through it we might cut the French rear off from the centre and put it between two fires. He jumped down from the hammocks and (so Dashwood told the story in later years) asked his little *aide*, "Dash, where is Sir George?"—"I think he is in the cabin, sir," was the answer. Both turned aft and came face to face with the Admiral, who was just stepping out of the gangway. Sir Charles went up to him, and, taking off his hat, pointed out the gap in the French line to Rodney, urging him to steer through it. For a moment

the Admiral hesitated. He did not like to "have things sprung on him" at any time, and now it behoved him to think. It was very well for the captain of the fleet to recommend the manœuvre; he would be covered by the authority of his Admiral. For Rodney, who would have to bear the responsibility for the consequences, it was a very serious step indeed. He had served under Mathews, and had not forgotten the fate which overtook that officer for departing from the consecrated rules of battle. His first impulse was to say no, and he did. "I will not break my line, Sir Charles," was his answer. In his eager conviction that he was right Douglas pressed the Admiral again, and even so far forgot himself as to actually give the order to port to the quartermasters. A fierce reminder of their respective positions from Rodney stopped him before the wheel had moved. Then, as we may well suppose, instinctively feeling the indecency of a wrangle, the two men turned from one another for a moment. The break in the dispute calmed both. They turned and faced one another near the wheel. Douglas respectfully implored Rodney to take his advice. Reflection had shown Rodney that his subordinate was right, and with a wisdom and magnanimity which have been strangely distorted, and a courtesy which has been wondrously misunderstood, he told Douglas to do as he pleased. At once the order to port was repeated. Dashwood was sent flying down with the needful directions to the lieutenants in the batteries. The *Formidable* swung round to starboard, and cut through the French line, pouring her broadside into the *Glorieux* to right and the *Diadème* to left as she went.

When he had given his consent to the change in the course of the *Formidable*, Rodney at once went aft to the stern-walk, to see whether the ships behind were following. There were then no means of signalling a new order suddenly, and the old order to engage to leeward was still flying. If his captains behaved as others had done in the fight with Guichen on April 17th two years before, if they stuck to the pedantic old rules, the *Formidable* might find herself alone to windward of the French. Happily a very different spirit prevailed now, and Captain Inglis of the *Namur*, the next ship astern to the *Formidable*, looking to the spirit and not the letter, followed his Admiral through the gap, though the signal to engage to leeward had not been hauled down. He was himself followed by Cornwallis in the *Saint Albans*, Dumaresq in the *Canada*, Charrington in the *Repulse*, and Fanshawe in the *Ajax*. These vessels filed past the *Glorieux*, reducing her to a wreck. Captain Inglis, looking after her as she dropped astern of him, saw her almost blown out of the water by the fire of the *Saint Albans*. By this movement all the eleven ships of Vaudreuil's division were cut off from the other nineteen, and forced to turn off to the west. Captain Alan Gardner of the *Duke*, the ship next ahead of the *Formidable*, finding that the *Diadème* had stopped the way of the French ships astern of her, and was in a confused tangle with them, spontaneously did as his Admiral had just done—ported his helm and passed to windward, firing right and left into the bewildered enemy.

In the meantime the French line had been cut in a second place. The last ship of the English centre divi-

sion was the *Bedford*, seventy-four, in which Commodore Affleck had his broad pennant flying. The *Bedford* had sailed along the French line close in the now dense smoke of battle, which would be particularly thick in the rear of the English line. As it was to leeward the smoke of both fleets would be rolled on our ships. Suddenly the *Bedford* found that there was no enemy to windward of her. She had, in fact, in the fog of gunpowder smoke passed through another gap in the enemy's formation, caused by the shift of the wind to the south-east. Affleck stood on, followed by the twelve ships of Hood's division. The Frenchman astern of which they passed was the *César*, the twelfth in the line. As the *Glorieux* was the nineteenth, it will be seen that seven French ships in the centre were cut off from their van and rear alike. These seven—the *Dauphin Royal*, seventy; *Languedoc*, eighty; *Ville de Paris*, one hundred and four; *Couronne*, eighty; *Eveillé*, sixty-four; *Sceptre*, seventy-four; and *Glorieux*, seventy-four—were huddled into a mass and torn to pieces by the fire of the *Formidable*, and the ships astern of her as far as the *Ajax*, which was poured into them from starboard, while thirteen of our ships, from the *Bedford* to the *Royal Oak*, were cannonading them from the port side. By eleven the last ship of the English rear had passed the *César*. Rodney had cleared the French line before. Our van under Drake had cleared the French rear, the sportive Captain Savage of the *Hercules* luffing to rake the last Frenchman—the *Pluton*, seventy-four, commanded by a very brave and skilful officer named D'Albert de Rions—as he cleared her. Then, all our ships being up to windward and out of the smoke, we could look back,

as the wind scattered it and rolled it to the west—could look and see such a spectacle as no British seaman had seen in this war so far.

There to westward and south-westward of us lay the French, broken into three fragments. On the surface of the water there was something which was pure horror to all whose eyes were compelled to see it. Shoals of sharks—which alone among God's creatures the sailor tortures without remorse, the loathsome brute which loiters to profit by his misfortune—had collected to feed on the corpses thrown overboard, or the living who had fallen with fragments of rigging. They were leaping over one another, and ravening at their prey. From them the eyes of our men turned to the scattered fragments of the French fleet. They were three in number. Vaudreuil with the rear had been turned to the west. Two miles south of him seven ships were huddled round the flag. Four miles to the south-east of him again was Bougainville. His course had taken him into the dead calm under the high land of Dominica. The English had themselves broken into three in dividing the enemy, but they had streamed up to windward. They could unite, and had it in their power to select the point of attack. Between the two fleets lay the dismasted hulks of the *César* and the *Glorieux*, the vessels astern of which the French line had been cut, rolling helpless on the water.

For an hour or so our advantage of position was not available. The thunder of so many guns had beaten down the wind. Conquerors and conquered lay bound by the calm. A little after mid-day a gentle breeze arose, and the English streamed down on the enemy. The

signal for the line of battle was hauled down, and we advanced in no order, as needing none against a foe already shattered. It has always been the weakness of the French to be enslaved by rules, and to become panic-stricken when these break down. There was panic among them now. Signal after signal was hoisted in vain by their admiral. Bougainville, tied by ill-will as much as by the calm, did nothing; Vaudreuil did little. The English as they felt the wind—all of them, that is, whose rigging had not been too severely cut up—pressed upon the enemy, steering, by a natural impulse and without express orders, to where the mighty bulk of the *Ville de Paris* and the flag of Grasse pointed out the great prize. The crippled *Glorieux* was the first of the enemy to surrender. A gallant attempt to save her was made by the French frigate *Richmond*, commanded by Captain Mortemart, a gentleman, as his name shows, of a good house. He offered to take the crippled liner in tow, but Trogoff de Kerlessi would not allow his gallant countryman to sacrifice himself and his ship in vain. The English were closing round. Trogoff cut the cable, telling Mortemart to save himself, and then surrendered his shattered vessel, as a brave man might, without dishonour. There was some honour in defeating enemies of that stamp. The *César* hauled down her colours soon after. The *Hector* and the *Ardent* fell next. This last was a most welcome prize. She had been taken from the English by the great combined fleet of Frenchmen and Spaniards which cruised at the mouth of the Channel in 1779. She alone had pushed out from among Bougainville's squadron to the help of her admiral, and was close to him when she struck. Her captain's name

was Gouzillon. The last of the French prizes to be taken was the *Ville de Paris*. The light winds made our movements slow, and our ships only came up with her when the afternoon was wearing on. They tackled her to port and to starboard, but the admiral fought as a man fights who wishes to atone by heroism for all faults. His cartridges were used up, and it was necessary to hoist powder-barrels out of the hold, and serve out the powder with the ladle. The solid fog of smoke between decks choked the lanterns by which the men worked below. Still, until nearly six he had not surrendered. Then, with the feeling which caused Francis I. at Pavia to refuse to give up his sword till he could hand it to the Viceroy of Naples, the *alter ego* of a sovereign and in some sort his equal, he looked about for a flag-officer to whom to surrender. At that moment Samuel Hood bore down on him in the *Barfleur*. She had been long becalmed, and it had been necessary to get the boats out to tow her into the breeze. Now she was pressing on to lay alongside the *Ville de Paris*. Grasse turned towards her, firing a gun of salute. Hood concluded that his old friend of the fights off Martinique and St. Kitts wished to surrender to him. He returned the salute, ranged up alongside, and the two admirals fought a space for honour's sake. There was no want of cartridges on board the *Barfleur*. Her guns were cold. Her men were fresh. Her terrible fire speedily overpowered the languid answer of the *Ville de Paris*, whose crew, diminished by a half, were fighting hopelessly in the dark of the smoke with guns which they could only slowly feed with powder. After a few minutes Grasse concluded that enough had been done. There were but three unwounded

men on his upper-deck, of whom he was one. More men had been slain in his ship than in the whole British fleet. There were not two square feet of his upper works unshattered by shot. His rigging was a wreck. At six o'clock he hauled down the Fleur de Lys with his own hands. A few minutes later he stepped into the cutter which shot alongside him from the *Barfleur*, and was taken a prisoner to Hood. By Hood he was taken to Rodney, and so ended a career which might have finished with honour if he had not later disgraced himself by ignoble attempts to throw the blame of defeat on his captains.

The battle was over, and had been over for some time; but in the opinion of many officers the pursuit should have lasted longer. If we can believe Thesiger, who wrote a few months later to his brother, Douglas pressed Rodney to follow the French through the night. Having wedged ourselves between Vaudreuil and Bougainville, it would seem that we might have followed and crushed either. The French were certainly broken into two. Part of them fled in panic to Curaçoa, six hundred miles off; others to San Domingo. But Rodney thought otherwise. He—so says Thesiger—silenced Douglas by telling him that he had already spoken too much. The captain of the fleet was beyond dispute so stung by this, or some similar, rebuke that he seriously thought of resigning his place to Fanshawe of the *Ajax*. He thought better of it, and was always afterwards perfectly loyal to his admiral when busybodies asked him if enough had been done. "We had a great deal to do, sir, and I think you will allow we did a great deal," was his uniform reply. Rodney did answer the

critics by giving his reasons for not pursuing. He alleged the crippled state of some of his ships, the probability that the French might reunite, the chance that the prizes might be lost, the necessity of going on to Jamaica and looking to its safety. These are, frankly, not reasons which would have satisfied Hawke, or Rodney himself twenty years before. But he was old, broken by disease, his hour of full triumph had come late, he had that day had thirteen hours of incessant strain of work and anxiety. Something must be allowed for human weakness. The pursuit was stopped and the fleet lay to for the night. The last incident of the battle was the loss of the *César*—a foreshadowing of what was to follow, for none of our prizes lived to reach England. After the surrender the French crew broke into disorder, and one of them, entering her spirit-room with a naked light, set fire to an unheaded cask of ratafia. The flames spread, and the *César* burned to the water's edge. The English prize-crew perished in her, the lieutenant in command being seen in the stern-walk fighting the fire to the last. No boat dared approach: the sharks were swarming under the counter; and he stayed to die in the flames, at his post.

Such, as far as I have been able to realise it, was the great battle sometimes called by us "of the Saints," but most commonly "of April 12th," and by the French termed the battle off Dominica. The failure to pursue was a blot; but after all, as Sir Charles Douglas was wont to say, "a great deal *had* been done." If we had not twenty prizes instead of five, we had destroyed at a blow the laboriously-built-up prestige of the French fleets in the New World, which was something. We had restored

our own nerve and shaken the enemy's. This result was fully shown some months later when Howe sailed on the final relief of Gibraltar. On that occasion the combined French and Spanish fleets shrank timidly from measuring themselves with a greatly inferior English force. The immediate effect of the battles was to break up the French fleet in the West Indies and to save Jamaica. Vaudreuil, who fled to San Domingo, waited only to collect as many ships as he could, and then sailed for the coast of North America. The French ships which had taken refuge at Curaçoa made no further attempt to keep the sea. It is true that during the remainder of the war, which dragged on till the beginning of 1783, the allies collected considerable fleets and continued to talk of renewing the attack on the West Indies. English Ministers, when called upon to defend the peace then made, pointed to the size of these fleets as reasons why we should accept less good terms than the nation thought we had a right to demand. But in truth the allies made no real use of those forces, and they were only quoted by English Ministers as an excuse for doing what they felt to be made necessary by the financial burden imposed by the war, and the fatigue caused by five years of fighting. Essentially the peace was a good one. We were, indeed, compelled to acknowledge the independence of the United States, and we restored Minorca and Florida to Spain; but we kept Gibraltar, we fixed our grip for ever on India, and we settled on equal terms with France. Our position was in reality intact and our spirit unbroken. That this was so was largely due to the victory of April 12th. It is therefore right that this day, and the man who commanded on it, should be

remembered among the great days and the great men of the Empire.

The battle has a place all its own in the history of our navy. It marked the beginning of that fierce and headlong yet well-calculated style of sea-fighting which led to Trafalgar, and made England undisputed mistress of the sea. Perhaps a little too much has been made of the manœuvre of "breaking the line." The value of a manœuvre in war is apt to depend on the value of the men who make it. The history of our own navy contains a convincing example of that truth. In 1811 Sir William Hoste fought an action off Lissa with a squadron of frigates against a French frigate squadron under Dubourdieu. The Frenchman deliberately imitated Nelson's plan of attack at Trafalgar. Yet he was completely beaten, and fell in the defeat. It would seem, therefore, that something more goes to the gaining of victories than manœuvres. In truth, the English fleet won because it was infinitely superior to the French—a hundred years ahead of it, as the prisoners acknowledged. If it had not so won before, it was because it had been tied down by pedantic rules. When Rodney broke from them he gave the real superiority of our ships a chance to exert itself. That superiority he himself had helped to create. No Sir Charles Douglas, no Edmund Affleck, no Hood even, can take that glory away. For the rest, are we the poorer because we had a splendid force as well as a great commander?

CHAPTER XIII

THE END

WHEN Rodney issued the order to cease action on the evening of April 12th, his active life had practically come to an end. He proceeded with his fleet and his prizes to Jamaica, after despatching Hood, somewhat tardily, in pursuit of the scattered French. Hood picked up two liners and a few smaller craft in the Mona Channel between Porto Rico and San Domingo. At Jamaica, Rodney was received with natural and well-deserved enthusiasm by the people whom he had saved from a great danger. He remained at Port Royal till the end of July. The work of refitting the squadron occupied him much, and was not made lighter by the condition of the dockyard, which had fallen into bad order since he had himself been on the station in 1774. He looked forward to exercising his command for some time longer—even to the end of the war. In a letter to his wife he begs her to contradict all reports that he was coming home. If he had wished to return after his victory, he might have done so with credit, for his work was done and his health had again broken down. At Port Royal he was so ill as to be compelled to hand over the command for a time to his second.

He still, however, clung to his great office, and in the circumstances he cannot be blamed for being loath to retire in the presence of the enemy.

Had he known what was passing in England while he was breaking up the French fleet it is possible that a request to be relieved might have accompanied the news of his victory in the despatch-box of Lord Cranstoun, who gave up his immediate prospect of a ship in order to be the bearer of good tidings to London. If the two documents had been delivered together he would have scored a double victory over the Ministry. At the very moment that he was pressing the pursuit of the French, his recall was being decided on by the Ministry, and it would have been something to have forestalled them. Lord North had been driven from office in March, and a Whig administration had succeeded. The new Cabinet resolved to recall the Tory admiral, and it is characteristic that the officer they chose to succeed him was Admiral Pigot. Pigot was a man of no distinction, of no experience in the command of fleets, and he had been long on shore; but he had sat for years in the House and had always voted steadily with the Whigs. For these services he was chosen to bear out the laconic order which told Rodney to haul down his flag, and to him it was given to succeed the most brilliantly successful commander of the war.

By one of the most ironical pieces of ill-luck—and the best merited—which ever overtook any Administration, the news of the great victory reached England just after Pigot had sailed. Orders were at once sent off to stop him, but it was too late. He was out of sight of land on his way to the West Indies before the messenger could

reach the port. There was nothing for it but to stick to their guns, to retort on their adversaries that the country had heard the news of the recall with indifference however loudly it cried out *after* receiving the news of the victory (which was perfectly true), and to protest the utmost respect for the Admiral. To do it justice, the Whig Cabinet executed itself with a reasonably good grace. Burke declared in his figurative classical way that if there was a bald spot on the head of the Admiral he would gladly cover it with laurels. A committee which had been appointed to inquire into the miscarriages at St. Eustatius was discharged. It was decided that Rodney should have a barony and another pension of £2000. Sandwich, who being now in Opposition could afford to be generous, declared that a barony was not enough. His own ancestor, the Admiral Montague who helped to restore Charles the Second, and was slain at Solebay, had received an earldom and more money for less than had been done by Rodney. There was truth in his criticism, but the Ministry cannot be accused of niggardly conduct if judged by the standard of the time. Titles were less lavishly given for service then than they had been before or have been since. Hawke, for example, received no title at all for the battle of Quiberon, which relieved the country from the fear of actual invasion. His barony was given him years afterwards. It does not appear that Rodney thought himself shabbily treated. He took his title from Rodney Stoke, but he did not close with the offer of the Duke of Chandos. Lady Rodney did not like the climate of Somerset, and the Admiral himself seems to have had no sentimental feelings in the matter. He was content with Hamp-

shire, which had always been his country-quarters in England.

Rodney left the West Indies in July and reached Bristol after a stormy passage, in September. His reception at home consoled him, if unmeasured popular applause was a consolation in such a case, for his summary recall. The country had not had many opportunities of welcoming victorious commanders in the course of this war. The good work done (and it had been much) had not been of the brilliant kind, and had too often ended in disaster. In Rodney's case there was now no doubt. He had taken a Spanish, a Dutch, and a French admiral —the last in the midst of a great fleet and on board the finest three-decker in the world. More liners had struck to him than to any English admiral since the elder Byng scattered the Spaniards off Cape Passaro nearly seventy years before. There was no shadow on this glory, and the nation gave way to one of those bursts of enthusiasm over it and the man who bore it, in which the phlegm of the English melts like "snaw off a dyke." From the day of his landing at Bristol till he retired from Court surfeited with praise, he was surrounded by cheering crowds; and when the applause died away it left a solid admiration and gratitude which endured to the end.

Rodney survived his triumphant return nearly ten years, but it is to be feared that there was more glory than ease in the end of his life. The lawsuits which sprang out of those unlucky transactions at St. Eustatius followed him almost to the grave—they or their consequences, which were pecuniary embarrassments. His gout too grew upon him, and before the close had begun,

according to a not improbable report, to affect his understanding. Much of his time was spent at spas at home or abroad. In 1787, when there was again a prospect of war with France, he volunteered to go on service, in spite of age and infirmities, if the King had need of him. The offer was acknowledged with fitting courtesy by Pitt, but it could not have been considered more than a sign of the veteran's goodwill. In 1789 he had again to write to Pitt. The King's first publicly known attack of madness had just occurred, and Rodney had taken what he believed to be the right side for one who was "bred a Royalist"—he had in fact acted with those who wished to give the regency without limitations to the Prince of Wales. Immediately afterwards he was informed that his son, Captain John Rodney, was likely to be refused a guardship appointment as a punishment for his own Parliamentary action. He wrote to the Prime Minister in very natural indignation—and indeed such an act done on such a motive would have been sufficiently ignoble, though perfectly in keeping with the practice of the time. It does not seem, however, that, as a matter of fact, Captain John Rodney ever wanted for commands.

The Admiral died on May 23rd, 1792, in his eldest son's house, the corner house of Prince's Street and Hanover Square, of gout. He had fainted with pain, and when he revived for a moment Sir Walter Farquhar, his doctor, asked him if he did not feel better, to which he replied, "I am very ill indeed," and so "expired without a sigh or a struggle."

If we look, as it is fair to look, to the importance of the great victory which he won in 1782, there can be no difficulty in assigning Rodney his place among

English admirals. He ranks next to Blake and to Nelson. From the time that the admiral of the Commonwealth defeated Tromp in the three days' battle which raged from Portland to Calais, no victory of equally vital consequence had been won. Until Trafalgar, which finally ruined Napoleon's efforts to cross us at sea, no such other was to be won. It may even, in a sense, be said with accuracy that of the two the fight off Dominica was more important than Trafalgar. If Villeneuve had never left Cadiz, the immense superiority of the English fleet would not have been diminished in the least. Napoleon had broken up the camp at Boulogne and marched into Germany before Trafalgar was fought. He had renounced his intention of invading England already; and Trafalgar, though a magnificent victory, was valuable rather as proving to us and to the world that England was safe than as adding to our existing safety. Moreover, it may be very reasonably doubted whether, without the encouraging example set by Rodney, our admirals of the Revolutionary War would have manœuvred as boldly as they did. The influence of that day is felt at once if we pass from any of the battles fought before it to Howe's victory on June 1st. Howe was by nature a circumspect man. He had expressly stated after reading Clerk of Eldin that, though it was all very ingenious, he for his part meant to keep to the old way. Yet, as a matter of fact, he departed widely from the old way, and won such a victory as would not have been possible if he had stuck to it. The deduction that he was led by the example of Rodney is irresistible. Indeed the battle of April 12th was a turning-point in the history

of naval warfare. From that time forward we hear nothing more of the pedantic old fighting orders. Admirals manœuvred to beat the enemy, and not to keep their own line intact.

A man who commanded on so great an occasion must for ever receive his share of honour. Yet the devil's advocate asks whether the occasion was not greater than the man, and it cannot be denied that he has a case. As Rodney himself said afterwards, with rare honesty and self-knowledge, the victory was largely won by accident. It was not thought out and done on a plan. His orders show that the Admiral meant to fight on the old method. He departed from it because the wind had disordered the enemy for him. He did not deliberately break the enemy up as Howe did on June 1st, as Nelson did at Trafalgar. He himself never showed any particular pride in his great victory. Whatever evidence there is goes to prove that he wished to be judged, not by the battle he won, but by the plan he laid to defeat Guichen on April 17th, 1780. That battle, he felt, would have been won by headpiece and not by luck. It was a very just distinction, and Rodney's glory will not be really affected if he is judged by the test he preferred. The plan of battle for the 17th was a good one, and shows that he was a tactician, though it also shows his limitations. As a tactician his glory is that he endeavoured to use the old tactics with intelligence. But he was not an innovator.

As a commander he ranks much higher. He could take the great line, looking to what was for the best when the war was considered as a whole. His watch was vigilant; his pursuit was close. He could select

from among the objects to be attained the most important, and could refuse to be drawn off by the less vital. His measures were not uniformly well taken, and for one interval of his life his spirit was dimmed; but, on the whole, he was an energetic leader, differing in kind from such a man as Arbuthnot, and in degree from such an officer as Hughes, the very valiant, very tough, but, alas! very commonplace admiral who was pitted against Souffren in the East Indies. Perhaps the most really honourable to him of all his feats was the destruction of Langara's squadron. He had an overwhelming superiority of numbers, no doubt, but the determination to pursue through the night and the storm on to a lee shore, the resolution to run the risk for a sufficient object, were worthy of his old leader Hawke—and more than that no man can say.

Personally Rodney was a very complete example of that aristocracy which governed England through the eighteenth century—with much selfishness and much corruption, no doubt, yet in the main with a high spirit, with foresight, with statesmanship, and with glory. It would be absurd to say that he was indifferent to place or money. He desired them both, and avowed the desire frankly. He was not, in a favourite modern phrase, sympathetic. There was about him a certain irritable promptitude to assert his own dignity, and one gathers that he rather enjoyed inspiring fear. Yet, like many men who are proud in place and office, he was kind to those who were dependent on him —to his children, to his wife, and to such friends as Gilbert Blane. He had that sense of the becoming in manners which rarely fails an aristocracy. Whatever

he may have said to Douglas or of Hood in private, he gave them their praise before the world in full measure. But the great redeeming quality in Rodney and in all that aristocratic class to which he belonged was this, that they did combine with their self-seeking a very high public spirit. They would intrigue for place, and would in matters of detail allow the interest of "the connection" to go before the good of the State; but when they spoke for their country to the foreigner, then they thought only of the greatness of England. For that greatness Rodney fought and would willingly have died. For it, and at a time of dire need, he, at the head of a force he helped to perfect, did a very great thing. For that his name should never be forgotten by Englishmen.

THE END

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